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THIS INDENTURE WITNESSETH.

BY MRS. ALFRED W. HUNT,

AUTHOR OF

"UNDER SEAL OF CONFESSION," "THORNICROFT'S MODEL," ETC.

"The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to scourge us."

KING LEAR.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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I.

RESOLUTION.

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THIS INDENTURE WITNESSETH.



CHAPTER I.

“Youth at the prow and Pleasure at the helm.”

GRAY.

My story begins in the days when those who journeyed between India and England were obliged to endure the tedious voyage by the Cape of Good Hope, and many months of sea—broken if they liked by a visit to Cape Town, and a short run into the interior, or a long one if they were not held in check by fears of the Chieftains Sandilli and Macomo, then up in arms against British rule. The inhabitants of Cape Town made much of these comers and goers, and in those days society there was formed of very different elements

to those which now go to its composition. There was no native parliaments then, and no members' wives of dubious gentility but fixed rank—it was a military society consisting of the governor, his staff of officials, and the naval officers on the station; and, besides these, there were always a certain number of Indian officers, for at that time these latter might in case of illness obtain a three months' leave, spend it at the Cape, and yet draw their full pay. Not unnaturally, they frequently availed themselves of this privilege; and to them and to their families the right hand of fellowship was always cordially extended. It was a strictly kept circle, but gay enough at all times; and even at the period I write about, when war was raging so near, there was still leisure for balls and picnics, and spirit to enjoy them, though those who danced at night might have to go off to the scene of action at sunrise.

That was the case the evening my story opens. The troop-ship *Britomart* was lying in the harbour, bound to set out at daybreak for Algoa Bay, to carry soldiers and supplies to

General Sir Harry Smith; and a grand ball was to be given at Government House, to which all the officers were going—and Audrey Wentworth, my heroine, was going too. She was just eighteen, very pretty, and an heiress according to the ideas of her day, when a thousand a year was a handsome income, whereas in these later times of astounding and abounding wealth, a gentle sigh of pity is given to those who think they can live on such a sum! An heiress's beauty is generally non-existent, but no one could have denied Audrey Wentworth's, though the first thought of many on seeing her would have been, "What a dear little thing she is!" rather than any exclamation in praise of face or figure. And yet she was not by any means little; on the contrary, rather tall, and it was only a sense of her sweetness and gentleness, and dependence on love and protection, which made people tack diminutives to her name and think of her as something to be cherished. Her face was oval, and perhaps a little pale; but all her features were good and expressive, and there were some lurking dimples in her

cheeks which made her especially bewitching when she smiled ; and when she was silent her eyes spoke for her. They were soft and grey, but looked almost black in the shade of their long lashes, and burnt with a steady light of warm-heartedness and trust. They were like a Scotch terrier's eyes in expression, though not in colour. Her hair was of a dark but intensely bright chestnut tint, very silky and pliant ; and it grew in such profusion that she might have rivalled the fair Armida, or the wife of Rabbi Akiba, who, as the Talmud relates, kept herself for twelve long years in bread by the sale of her abundant tresses. Her figure was slight and graceful, she moved with a quiet, natural dignity ; and of all the good gifts of which she was possessed she was profoundly unconscious. She only knew one thing, that she had a brother who was simply perfect ; and so long as he saw nothing in her to object to, she was content to remain as she was.

Her eighteen years of life had not been very bright or happy, though she hardly knew it. She had always thought herself

tolerably happy—but after all, the existence of a girl sent home from India for health's sake, to live with comparative strangers for twelve or fourteen years, cannot be very enviable. Audrey and Dudley Wentworth had as children never known the care of a mother : they had a very devoted father, but he was an officer in India ; and when it was necessary to send his children away to England, all he could do was to place them at school. They saw each other during the holidays, and passed those holidays at the houses of friends or relations ; but the friends were not great friends, and they had no relations nearer to them than a cousin of their father's, a Mr. Philip Wentworth, of Minsteracres. He was a confirmed invalid, who lived in a very quiet way on a large estate in Yorkshire, shut up for the most part in his room, and rarely feeling himself well enough to see the two children even when they were under his roof.

When Audrey was sixteen, her father came over to England. He stayed some time in his native country ; paid a visit in his turn to his

kinsman, Mr. Philip Wentworth, and found him as difficult to get on with as every one else did. Colonel Wentworth then placed Dudley at college, and carried Audrey back to India with him. They spent one year happily together; and then Colonel Wentworth died very unexpectedly, and Audrey was obliged to accept the kindness of friends, and wait under their protection until her brother came to escort her home.

Colonel Wentworth had not been able to do much towards saving a fortune for his children, and many a time Dudley wondered how he and his sister were to live on the slender little income of fifty pounds a year each, which was theirs by inheritance. But while they were lingering in India their prospects changed, and suddenly they found themselves possessed of riches. The invalid cousin died, and left Dudley his estate of Minsteracres, with the fine old house and all it contained. The land brought in from three to four thousand a year, and some profitable investments four or five thousand more. To Audrey he left an annuity of a thousand

a year; so that young lady, who had been frugally brought up by a father who was not rich himself, and who had never dared to count on the invalid's promises of what he would do for him and for all of them some day, suddenly found herself in a position to indulge all her fancies; and with joy and fervour, she devoted herself to the task of doing so. Such an Indian shawl as she bought was never seen!—she almost longed to be old enough to wear it. Such lovely filagree jewellery! Such fans! Not all for herself—no, spending the money was the pleasure, and choosing the pretty things. And Master Dudley also began lavishly to indulge the various tastes called out by association with his present companions, though there was a certain restriction set on the expenditure of both the young people, for the lawyer who had written to announce the death of the generous cousin had only sent a limited remittance, and more could not now be readily obtained until their return to England. They had got as far as the Cape of Good Hope on their homeward way, but

when they were once in England what happy lives they would lead.

They well knew Minsteracres, for when there as children they had run wild, unchecked by the presence of their host, who was always hid away in his own room. They knew the size of the oaks in the park, had measured them all, had climbed the trees, and frightened the deer, and chased the rabbits, and stolen the apricots in the garden, and broken the glass in the greenhouses, and risked their lives for the jargonelle pears which grew out of their reach under the bed-room windows, and peeped into the cabinets in the long gallery which was all given up to curiosities and treasures of antiquity and gems of art; and they had wondered at the size and emptiness of the great dining and drawing-rooms, and the fabulous number of books in the library. Nobody used the big rooms, nobody read the books; the old family plate never saw daylight, the furniture in the principal rooms was always shrouded in holland coverings. They meant to use everything, unlock hidden stores, bring out concealed treasures, spend their

money, fill the hall with guests, have balls, archery meetings, picnics, and riding parties, and live together enjoying every good thing wealth could give. And that they might do this thoroughly, they often declared to each other they would neither of them marry for ever so long! "You were done for if you married! had duties and were expected to do them, and to be grave and decorous, and set an example and so on." They did not want to do all that yet.

As for Dudley, he had no precise scheme for his future life. There had been a time when it was intended by his father that he should take orders. What a good thing his territorial honours had come to him before he carried out that intention, for once a clergyman he would not have liked to be an idle one, and this other life was so much more to his taste. He intended to do something in the world, perhaps to go into Parliament—that was the legitimate outlet for the energy of a county gentleman. He would wait until he got home before making any very definite plans for the future, but he certainly did not mean to die

without distinguishing himself somehow. Meantime, what a heaven on earth existence was and would be to a fellow with eight thousand a year! And to think if it had not been for that dear benevolent old gentlemen at Minsteracres, who had never seemed to like him particularly when he was a boy, he might have struggled on in poverty to the very end of his life. He felt a twinge of gratitude to him, and began to choose the architect who should build something, some day, to show respect to his memory. Dudley had seen so little of his cousin that there might be a chance of forgetting him if not—and that must not be. No, it should be something really handsome! And then his thoughts dwelt fondly on the charms of the place of which he was now master, and he longed to get back to England to it.

That was not so easy! He had let one steamboat go to please his dear friends here at the Cape, and he must wait for another. He and his sister were staying with a merchant, whose wife was a cousin of one of the principal officers in Cape Town. Audrey and

her father had paid them a visit on their way out, and Dudley on his, and they were old family friends to whom it was all but impossible to say no. Few people would have liked to say no to a visit to Bellosguardo, for its owner, Mr. Armitage, was a very clever, agreeable man, and his wife was simply charming; and so, in truth, was their home itself.

Bellosguardo was about five miles from Cape Town, on the East road: a low-built house, with a verandah all round it, covered with a flowery tangle of climbing plants, and the garden was the very place for a summer evening's lounge; or you might dine in some bowered recess, so shaded by trees you never guessed that the thermometer stood at 100° outside, while flowers of unwonted form crowded into life all around you, or fruits ripened by your side ready for your dessert.

Every one who had a chance of going to Bellosguardo did go, and every one felt that an hour or two there was well worth the dusty, hot five miles of open road, on which the African sun spent its fury. It was not only

the gay and prosperous who were made welcome at Bellosguardo; many a sick officer had been moved from his dismal berth on board ship, taken thither, nursed, and sent on his way—one more fervent believer in the presiding spirit of the place.

Mrs. Armitage was a very pretty woman, with a soul large enough to ask still prettier women to stay in her house, and a heart given to take an interest in love affairs. She had large experience of these, for the sight of her happy household sent many a wavering bachelor off in a hurry, to seek a wife as like her as possible.

“I wonder no one has lost his heart in earnest to Audrey yet!” said she to herself, as she made her way from her own dressing-room to that of the said young lady on this evening of the ball, to see how she was getting on with the important act of dressing for a first appearance in public.

She found her standing, glass in hand, looking at some complicated arrangement of the profuse masses of her hair. She might have been trying to pose for the famous

picture of Titian's wife, she did it so thoroughly. She twisted it up quickly in a knot at the back of her head, and would wear no ornament but a spray of Cape jessamine, disregarding of the indignant looks and growls of disapprobation of Mrs. Armitage's maid, who said that, really and truly, a young lady who had such hair as that had no right to go with it so plain.

"Look, ma'am," said she, taking courage from her mistress' approach; "here's Miss Wentworth, who has a head of hair any one might be proud of, won't seem to have half as much as any of the ladies there who let it be dressed as it should be."

And she flourished long trailing masses of false hair, which she had desired to put under and in between rolls of Audrey's hair, so as to build up a fabric large enough to suit her ideas of beauty.

But there was no persuading Audrey. She would wear no more hair than nature had given her. Her dress was a long, plain, mellow-looking white silk, and her only ornaments were jet. But she looked infinitely

charming, in spite of her maid's regretful glances at various discarded jewels.

It was her first ball, and she was nervous. In India she had never danced, for she lived with her father at a very retired station, and when in Calcutta, after his death, she had had no heart for amusement; but to-night she meant to be happy, if only any one asked her to dance.

Mrs. Armitage smiled as she heard her say that. Was a girl like Audrey likely to be without partners? If so, the young men of this day were very different from those she remembered!

CHAPTER II.

“ This life, sae far’s I understand,
Is a’ enchanted fairy land,
Where pleasure is the magic wand,
That, wielded right,
Maks hours like minutes, hand in hand,
Dance by fu’ light.”

BURNS.

“ WHAT a stunning girl that is in the long white dress! I wish some one would introduce me to her,” said Mr. Townsend—called “the boy” in his regiment, because of his tender years; but who always singled out the prettiest girl at every place they went to for his admiration, and never relaxed his suit—a suit with more or less definite aim—no, not even if his colonel was in love with the same lady.

“ By Jove, yes!” said Mr. Brian Templemore. “ Who is she? I did not catch her

name; but Aplin has been dancing with her!"

Aplin came up at this moment with a young gentleman, who was no other than Dudley Wentworth, brother to the lady they were talking about; but "the boy" did not know it.

"Aplin, I say," said he vehemently, "what a fellow you are! You are always in luck—do introduce me to that lovely young party in white silk: Miss—what is her name?"

"Miss Wentworth. Mr. Reginald Townsend—Mr. Dudley Wentworth," was Mr. Aplin's answer; "brother of the young lady with whom you saw me dancing," said he in a low voice when he had completed the introduction. But "the boy" was by no means abashed, and said—

"Oh, I am glad! You won't mind my admiring your sister, Mr. Wentworth, I am sure; I can't help it, no one could, but I'm always pleased when any one admires Janie or Emily, my sisters, you know. Would you mind introducing me to Miss Wentworth?"

Dudley, unperceived, made a slight grimace as if he thought young Mr. Reginald Town-

send was a little bit of an upstart, and probably not aware that he was addressing that lordly personage, Dudley Wentworth of Minsteracres, and half wished some one would be so kind as to inform him—but he did not make any difficulty about performing the introduction, being a courteous youth in the main; but just as they got near Audrey, if she did not glide away from them in a waltz with a middle-aged military gentleman!

“Hang it!” said “the boy,” “the Frosty Cupid is going to dance with her!”

“What do you mean? Who is the Frosty Cupid?” asked Dudley.

“The colonel in command of the troops going to Algoa Bay—those on board the *Britomart*, you know.”

“By Jove!” said Dudley, “then he had better make the most of his time, for he will have to sail by daybreak, won’t he?”

“Soon after at any rate.”

“He’ll have to do with balls of another sort before he gets back.”

“Old buttons and bits of stones! So shall I,” replied “the boy”; “that’s why I want to

enjoy this—but you will introduce me to your sister by-and-by, won't you, Mr. Wentworth?—That Fairfax is a perfect nuisance in a ball-room!" And he strode away, fuming and fanning himself with his handkerchief, to the second-best beauty in the room, and danced away as if his heart were in the waltz, leaving Dudley Wentworth standing with his new acquaintance, Mr. Templemore.

"What kind of a fellow is Fairfax?" inquired the former.

"First-rate," was the answer. "He is a real downright good fellow, but has a very soft place in his heart for the ladies. That's why we call him the Frosty Cupid, but none of them ever really catch him. He has a frantic love affair in every place the regiment goes to, but it always comes to nothing somehow. Either the father won't give his consent, or the girl hers, or he can't get his own; but the end is he goes away looking very disconsolate, and his hair gets a little greyer—it is nearly white now—and then, the very first ball he goes to in the new place, he is at it again as hard as ever. At least, that is what they tell me, for

I have not known him long. I like him because he is such a fine fellow, such a good officer—every one says that, for my opinion on such matters would not be worth much.”

Dudley Wentworth was silent a moment; he was vexed to think *his* sister was dancing with a man who had a reputation of this kind. He did not suppose it would hurt Audrey to dance with this Colonel Fairfax, but he liked *his* sister to be above all chance of having her name mixed up in any chronicle of garrison flirtations, because she was *his* sister. And then he remembered Colonel Fairfax was to sail away in an hour or two, and they themselves a week or so after, and that he need not be particular about things of this kind till they were in England. So he turned to his companion, and said—

“Why is your opinion not as good as any one else’s? You are an officer yourself, are you not?”

“No, I am not,” replied Mr. Templemore; “I only wish I were.”

“But you are going with Fairfax to the frontier?”

“Only as a volunteer. You see, the —— were quartered close by my father’s place, and when they were ordered off to the Cape, I thought it would be good fun to go too, and so I volunteered—and that’s how I come to be here.”

“Upon my word!” said Dudley, “I’d like to go with you—but it’s too late for me to think of that now; besides, I am terribly wanted at home. I ought to be in Yorkshire this very moment.”

“Yorkshire!” cried Mr. Templemore.

“Yes. You know the county?”

“Rather! I’se Yorkshire too. What part do you come from?”

And then Dudley, with some well-concealed importance, explained that he was the owner of Minsteracres, near Dorminster, and that he was on his way home now to take possession of it.

“And so Minsteracres is yours, and Breamore Court will be mine some day, and the two estates lie side by side. Now, is not that strange? If you read it in a novel you would exclaim, ‘How improbable!’ But

is it not odd that you and I, who are, so to speak, next-door, certainly next-gate, neighbours at home, should be introduced to each other in this outlandish place? Well, all I can say is, I am glad to make your acquaintance; and if the Caffres don't make away with me by the Great Fish River, see if we don't have some good shooting together some day. And now you must introduce me to your sister—if we are going to be such very near neighbours in England, I feel as if I had a claim."

But just as Dudley and his new friend were threading their way through the crowd of ex-dancers, if "the boy"—the incorrigible and irrepressible boy, regardless of the large hole he was thus recklessly making in his own heart—did not actually carry off the pretty Miss Audrey Wentworth before the eyes of Mr. Templemore and her brother, and whirl her off to the other end of the room, leaving them, the Frosty Cupid, and many others all alike lost in wonder at the amount of audacity which the possession of a commission in her Majesty's service gave one who stood five feet

five and three-quarters in his stocking feet, and who had barely the weight of seventeen years on his shoulders.

“That boy is the best joke I know,” said the Frosty Cupid, *alias* Colonel Fairfax. “Always the very prettiest girl in the room must be his partner. I can’t conceive how he manages it. There was Miss Bellenger at York, and Miss Prescott at Salford. I declare I can’t conceive how the fellow manages it. Sheer impudence, I believe! What o’clock is it? I am afraid it is getting late.”

For already the cold start in the early morning was beginning to threaten the dancers. But it was only one o’clock; there was supper and many a pleasant dance to come before that need be thought of.

Mr. Templemore was very much struck with Miss Wentworth, and charmed to think of her as a future neighbour, but piqued by finding how difficult it was to get a word with her now. Uniforms always carry the day in a ball-room; it does seem such a tame, commonplace thing to dance with a man in a plain black coat. But he took her in to

supper, thus carrying the day against "the boy," who managed, however, to secure a place on her left hand. Mr. Templemore kept her ear all the time; while "the boy," boy-like, revenged himself on the eatables, grumbling at this, despising that, but eating steadily notwithstanding. He had learned, twenty minutes before, that Audrey was an heiress, and he was just beginning to have serious intentions; but Mr. Templemore had such an advantage over him in knowing Minster-acres, and being able to sympathize with her admiration of the park, and to give her the last news of the changes in the household, that "the boy" felt he could not compete with him. Audrey and Mr. Templemore were rapidly becoming great friends, and they gave strong proof of this by dwelling on the surprise they felt that they had never met in England, and their endeavours to account for their respective absences just at the very time when the one or the other was in the neighbourhood.

Audrey, being a schoolgirl and alone, had, when she was there, been very much under

the dominion of the housekeeper, especially as the said housekeeper was a woman of a commanding mind; and she had never left the grounds, except to go to the village church. And Dudley had not been allowed to go to Minsteracres at all after the time when he had shot a red-backed shrike, which was showing a disposition to settle there. Old Mr. Wentworth had been furious at this idiotic murder, as he called it, and had refused to have such a "great unmanageable boy" sent to him again after that; and Mr. Templemore himself had been abroad, or at college, so it was no wonder they had not met.

"But when you go back," said he, "you won't shut yourselves up as Mr. Philip Wentworth did; I assure you that there is a great deal to do even in a country place like Minsteracres. There are assize balls at Dorminster, and archery meetings at Brusselton, and picnics—dinner-parties you won't care for."

"Oh, my brother and I have made up our minds to be as happy as the day is long; we

have no one to please but ourselves, so you may believe that if we are not happy, it is our own fault. I often wish we were there ; we shall be very soon if all goes well."

Mr. Templemore sighed, and thought of Fish River bush, and encounters with skulking savages, who had as great a talent for slipping out of your fingers as young Tamlane of the ballad. After all, thought he, Government ought to have sent out a strong corps of men who do not trouble to wear clothes, but are able to grease their bodies and creep along on all-fours, as these black fellows do—that is what they should have done if they wanted to gain credit in bush-fighting.

The alarming announcement that "Fish River bush was full of Caffres" had had great attractions for him when he was at home at Breamore, but now that Minsteracres was going to be glorified by the presence of Miss Audrey Wentworth, home became a place to which he looked forward to returning with enhanced interest. He sighed a little, and said—

"If those black beggars do not prove too

many for us, we shall meet again in England some of these days."

"We are sure to meet," interrupted "the boy," who had got to the creams and jellies.

"I hope so," said Audrey gently, not thinking so much of the pleasure of meeting with either of them as forming a mental prayer for their safety, for she knew how ferocious the Caffres were, and how hard it must be to fight in an impenetrable bush against invisible enemies active in using firearms.

And then, by the grey light of dawn, all the officers of the *Britomart* hurried away to their ship. Their eyes still had a dazzle of ball-room light in them as they stepped on board, and the feet of many betrayed a disposition to slide over the deck to some snatch of remembered music; but it was crowded with men making ready in earnest for prompt departure—names were being called over, orders given, anchors heaved, and the time for amusement was gone by.

Most of them crept into their cabins, undressing with memories of the "Aurora," the "Valse d'Amour," and other favourites of the

day, struggling confusedly with drowsiness and the noise overhead ; and then they stretched their weary bodies with a momentary consciousness of the beneficence of rest. One more hazy but blissful recollection of all delights of sound and movement, glance of eye and touch of hand, luxuriously blended together, and then tired brains felt their grasp of everything slipping away from them, and sleep sealed all.

CHAPTER III.

“Sir, the superiority of a country gentleman over the people upon his estate is very agreeable, and he who says he does not feel it to be agreeable lies.”—BOSWELL’S JOHNSON.

“Who knows how near to death he walks
Who treads as now most upright in the sun?”

SWINBURNE.

THE day after the ball, Audrey Wentworth scorned to own she was tired. It was the first she had been to, and it was a point of honour with her to show that she was not a weak creature, incapable of bearing fatigue. She tried to occupy herself as usual, but it was hard to settle to anything when her mind was so full of all that had passed so short a time before. Bright uniforms flashed before her eyes, complimentary speeches rang in her ears. She had thoroughly enjoyed herself, and thought that the life of a girl who went

to balls every night must be paradisaical, and wondered how much of an approach to such a life her own would be when once back in England.

“When once back in England!” was a phrase which cropped up continually in all conversation between herself and Dudley: they did so enjoy this state of looking forward—this vista of golden possibilities. The present was happy and delightful; but, as they fondly hoped, the future was theirs, to shape as they chose. They were absolutely their own masters, with ample means unconditionally made over to them. Every thought of this future was jubilant. It had always been so, and last night she had discovered one more bright feature in the prospect: they would have a pleasant neighbour at Minsteracres. How very agreeable Mr. Templemore was! How well he danced! How much more gentlemanlike he was than the other officers! But when Audrey got so far in her meditations and found how rapidly she was enumerating his perfections, she could not help laughing at herself. How silly! She surely was not

going to fall in love at first sight—that was how people who did so perhaps talked, but there was nothing for which she should so much despise herself as that! She did not believe in such a thing really. She said to herself that people who did that must “coach up” the sentiment; thus mentally using one of Dudley’s college expressions to convey her meaning. Still, though she had no very particular feeling about this Mr. Templemore, there was no denying he was handsome: not so handsome as Dudley, of course, but Dudley and he were so entirely unlike each other in appearance that it would be impossible to compare them; and having said that, she of course began at once to try to do so. Dudley’s complexion was the least good part of him: it was rather pale, with a strong dash of iron-grey in it; while Mr. Templemore’s was of a rich warm brown, with a ruddy tinge in each cheek. Dudley had a profusion of dark brown hair arranged in orderly masses—obstinate hair, without a wave or a twist in it, and very different to that of Brian Templemore, which was black and silky, and of a

great length when drawn out straight; but so curly that it twisted itself up and clustered round his head till its length was concealed and it looked far thicker than it really was. His eyes were very bright black ones, while Dudley's were of a cold steely blue. Dudley's nose was not an ugly one, though inclined to be of the cogitative order; but his mouth and chin were his best features, both being peculiarly well cut, his mouth especially so, with lines and curves which bore witness to a line of well-trained ancestors. Mr. Templemore also had an unimpeachable array of ancestors on the father's side; but his mother was of humbler origin. She had been married for her beauty, and had transmitted much of it to her son, who from very boyhood had been used to hearing himself called "Handsome Brian." Still there were in his face some lines not so shapely as those in Dudley's, though it might be hard to impute these to the less aristocratic side of the house.

While Audrey was thus mentally considering the points of likeness and unlikeness between the two, Dudley himself came

sauntering into the very path in the garden in which she was loitering : smoking in one moment and declaring himself “ seedy ” in the next. He was very proud of Audrey, partly for her own sake, but chiefly because she was his sister. *My* sister—the “ *my* ” very much emphasized—betrayed so much of the constitution of Dudley’s mind. He was very proud of himself, and felt that the *my* imparted a certain value to anything used in connection with it—was a kind of hall-mark none could disallow. All his things were well chosen—good to the very limit of his power of obtaining them so. He had not of course chosen his sister, but she was his sister, and that implied much that there was no occasion to dwell upon. He was quite aware that he was very good-looking ; that he had brains far above the average, and was safe to get on in any line of life if only he had an opening. He had always known that, and what an opening he had now ! He would certainly distinguish himself in some way, either in public life, or as a beneficent and far-seeing ruler of house and land in Yorkshire. In one way he was

resolved to be pre-eminent: he would make his house of Minsteracres such a charming place to stay in, from its varied sources of pleasure, each of which should be as perfect of its kind as unstinted money and unremitting care from himself could make it, that he would be able to count on the society of the highest in the land. Not the highest in mere rank; for when he and Audrey built all these their castles in the air, mere worldly rank counted for very little in their programme of the future. Of course they would have a duke or two now and then, just to show they could have them if they liked; but the magnates of their society should be those who led the world, or gave it its highest pleasures.

“We will have R—— and B——, of course,” said Audrey, “if we can only get them to come; and we will give them delightful little rooms to write in, with good pens always ready, and we will let them be just as quiet as they choose—quite alone all day if they prefer it; but they must want society sometimes like other people, and models too. So no doubt they will come amongst us now and then.”

“ I don’t suppose T—— will ever come, for he seems to be, as my old bed-maker at Oxford used to say, ‘ very much resigned to his own company,’ but we will have the best painters and authors, and all the top men in all walks.”

“ Suppose they fight, as the robin redbreasts do, when you get in two or three together,” said Audrey, who never doubted her brother’s power of drawing those he chose around him. “ Don’t you remember that great snow-storm at Minsteracres, when we had three in at once in the breakfast-room, and they fought a triangular duel ? ”

“ Oh, we must see that they have proper distractions. We won’t have any critics, I think—or shall we have some, Audrey ? ”

“ Perhaps they might all like it,” replied Audrey.

“ H’m—I don’t know. I dare say they would, though. We will have picnics to Ravenskelfe Abbey, and jolly days at Dorminster.”

“ All personally conducted ! ” said Audrey, with a sly appreciation of Master Dudley’s ruling weakness or strength.

“Naturally,” replied Dudley; and then, perhaps because he felt she had given him a slight check, he said, “By-the-by, Miss Audrey, twice is quite as often as you ought to dance with the same person, if you want to behave properly at balls. Remember that, please!”

Audrey always let Dudley assume head-of-the-family airs as he liked. She was cleverer than he was, and had a much stronger character, though she did not know it; but she held her strength in quiet reserve, content to rely on one whom she believed to be, in every respect, her own superior.

“I did not dance more than twice with any one,” was her answer. “I danced twice with that little Mr. Townsend, and twice with Mr. Templemore.”

“Yes, but Templemore took you in to supper; that counts as once more.”

“Oh, does it?” said Audrey. “I did not know that. I’ll remember. But explain to me who these Templemores are.”

“This Mr. Templemore’s father used to be the Tory member for Dorminster, till his

health broke down. They live at Breamore. You know Breamore—we can see it from the bed-room windows of our own house?"

Audrey asked a few more questions, but there was not much that Dudley could tell her, except that Breamore Court was not so handsome a place as Minsteracres.

Old Mr. Templemore (so to call him, for he was not so very old after all) had more land than Dudley, but it was said to be a good deal encumbered with debt, which Dudley's was not, and the latter meant to add considerably to his estate before long.

It had seemed to Audrey so surprising that Dudley should get even so much land as he had already, that she looked up in wonder at this; and he told her she was a silly little thing! Could he not buy more? Mr. Philip Wentworth, his predecessor, had let chances of buying land slip by him times without number—young Templemore had told him that—and had invested thousands and thousands of pounds in some low mercantile concern. Some mine, or works, or shares, he did not know what, but he meant to get out of it,

whatever it was, and put the money into land.

“And what am I to do with my money? I never can spend it. Shall I buy a field or two near yours? No; I think I had better build myself a pretty little house close by Minster-acres, to go to when you marry.”

“When I marry,” said Dudley, “I shall see that my wife makes my sister as welcome as I do myself.”

“Dudley,” said Audrey, smiling, “you could buy a very nice wife here for nine cows: that is what a Caffre chief offered for Mrs. Armitage. Why, I declare it is dinner-time!”

This exclamation was caused by the sight of a party of servants, with a snowy table-cloth and glasses sparkling in the sunshine, crossing the lawn to lay the table for dinner in the shade of some trees; and a gay party from town drove in to enjoy it with them. And all drank to the health of the poor Britomarts, and wondered how far they had got on their way; but that they did not know until next morning.

It is possible to hold out one day after a

ball without yielding anything to sleep or much to fatigue, but when night comes, and you at last go to bed, nature claims her rights, and your rest is deep and dreamless. It might have been ten o'clock the morning after, when Audrey was aroused from a sleep so long and tranquil, that her cheek had never once moved from the place on the pillow on which it had sunk nearly twelve hours before, by a loud exclamation of something that sounded like horror from the next room, Mrs. Armitage's dressing-room; and while she was wondering if she was still dreaming, the news came to her that the *Britomart* had struck on the rocks, and all on board had perished, except seven or eight women and some children, with the crew of the boats which saved them.

Audrey stared as if she had no power of comprehending such a sudden and overwhelming blow; the remembered faces rose up one by one before her. She named them, thinking some might have been spared, but could learn no more than that all were gone. Drearly she arose and dressed herself, her

teeth chattering with horror; but Mrs. Armitage could not bring herself to believe in such wholesale calamity. She was sure some were saved.

The news had been brought to the governor of Cape Town by a man riding in all haste from Adam's Bay. He had been despatched as soon as the fact was known, but the wreck had taken place some miles north of Adam's Bay, and perhaps when he set out the whole truth was not known. No doubt some of the poor fellows were saved. Mr. Armitage shook his head when he heard her say so; he knew the coast well—the long ridges of jagged rocks, which were the terror of storm-driven vessels; the miles of beds of closely interwoven seaweed, which barred the shore from all approach by rowing or swimming, except at rare intervals. These dense fields of sea-weed were nearly as formidable as the rocks themselves, and almost as impenetrable. And there were other dangers, for the bay was full of sharks; and even if any men escaped from the wreck, how could they reach the shore? And what a shore it was when reached! Wastes of dry

sand where nothing was to be seen but spiky aloes and cactuses, and thorny undergrowth of shrubs, with never a human habitation for miles and miles.

Mrs. Armitage could not bear to hear this description of the possible sufferings of any survivors. She resolved to send help; the carriage—two carriages should go to Adam's Bay, to see if any stragglers had succeeded in getting there, and men on horseback must go to some little homesteads inland, for there were two or more some nine miles from the sea. If any men were found, Mr. Armitage, she said, must let her have them at Bellosguardo; she would nurse them. She could not be happy in the simple exercise of feelings of commiseration, she must do something. The civil commissioner of the district had ordered the country to be scoured for miles inland, and the whole line of coast to be searched. Some poor creatures must certainly have been found in the weeds, or on the rocks, or clinging to spars, or somewhere; for the wreck had, after all, taken place in comparatively shallow water. Her husband must not oppose

her; the idea had come into her head as it were of its own accord, and that was a plain sign that it had been given for a purpose, and that something would come of it.

So light carts were sent off, and their drivers were ordered to bring back with them any sufferers able to move; and they took with them clothes and provisions, for those who might be found would be in need of everything. And the gentlemen rode off also, to try to learn more, and see if they could be of use; but the poor women, after giving every possible order for the reception of those who as they hoped might come, had little else to do than sit down and meditate on the suddenness and completeness of the calamity which had befallen their countrymen.

It was quite two days before the carriages returned. They were preceded by Mr. Armistage and Dudley Wentworth, who had spent the intervening time in helping those employed in the work to search the weed, in riding along the coast backwards and forwards, and in exploring the bush in hopes of finding some poor fugitives from death. Their

time had been well spent; and Mr. Armitage told his wife that never again would he doubt the wisdom of any of her schemes of benevolence, for she had been the means of saving one life at any rate, and that was young Mr. Templemore's. Many sailors and officers had been found near the scene of the disaster clinging to spars, or caught in the weed, and some of them were in a state so pitiable that it would have seemed more merciful had they died at once. The way Mr. Templemore was saved was this. While riding here and there about the country, Mr. Armitage saw some sailors who, barefooted and half naked, almost blinded by the sun and burnt up by the heat, had won their way inland to a small Dutch farm, and had there received the best care the inmates could give them. They told him that an officer had fought his way through the bush with them for the greater part of the distance, but had at last sunk down in utter weariness on the sand, and was by this time, no doubt, dead. Mr. Armitage took one of these men on his horse with him, and made him try to guide him as near to the spot as

possible. As the bush thickened, he was, of course, obliged to dismount, but at last, with great difficulty, he succeeded in reaching him. Poor fellow! he breathed still, but it was a marvel how he had got so far, for he was so bruised by the surf beating him against the rocks, so exhausted by the effort of finding a passage through the sea-weed, so faint with inanition, so shattered in body and mind with the shock of the shipwreck and the sight of his companions and friends struggling with death in all forms of horror, and in nearly all cases struggling in vain, that even now it was necessary to keep him very, very quiet, if he was to have any chance of escape after all.

He was lying in one of the carriages, with a sailor as ill as himself, too ill to disturb him. Both were propped up with the rugs and cushions Mrs. Armitage had sent; and as Mr. Templemore was lifted out, Audrey caught a glimpse of a pale face so unilluminated by consciousness, that she could hardly identify him with the gay partner of so short a time ago. He was at once carried upstairs to a pleasant bed-room, and the strange, shapeless

clothing with which some charitable person had covered him was removed from his heavy aching body, and he was laid down on a bed which he was not likely to leave for some time. Other carts and carriages followed with other sufferers, some in woeful plight enough, others able to bless the kind lady for what she was doing for them, which was more than poor Templemore could do ; indeed it was doubtful whether he knew that anything was being done for him, though he may have been dimly conscious of the relief of rest and quiet.

CHAPTER IV.

“Denkt ihr 'an mich ein Augenblickchen nur,
Ich werde Zeit genug an euch zu denken haben.”

FAUST.

SOMETIMES, after a pause of silence, when the eye has been contentedly dwelling on the abundant beauty which nature lavishes on those remote spots of earth still left to her governance, an invalid breaks out into the exclamation—“What a delightful place this would be to die in!” In these byways of the world, death seems deprived of half its terrors. To be borne away to rest through green lanes, to sleep in a quiet churchyard enclosed by lichened, fern-grown walls overshadowed by trees, with the grey old church watching over you, and the sea chanting a continuous requiem not far off, seems a very different thing to the unlovely ceremony

which in the heart of a crowded town marks the passage of a pilgrim to another world. An invalid, moreover, in the country has surely better chances of winning his way back to life and health than one who, from the windows of a dull house in a smoke-stained, noisy street, can see nothing but other dull houses and streams of fellow-creatures, counterparts of his former self, all hurrying by, with strength to use or misuse in the many-branching paths which greed of gain, mere use and wont, stress of passionate work, or bright lures of pleasure and ambition may bid them tread. Such an outlook brings no healing strength, no renewal of long-forgotten love and worship of nature, but rather deals a fresh wound; for even as these are now was he before trouble came upon him. Was it all worth the cost? He turns away to avoid the sight, but in the country he could avoid the thought also, and be filled with the sweet sense of nature's measured, orderly, and beautiful succession of beneficent change.

As for our poor invalid, Brian Templemore, he was placed in just the very circum-

stances likely to promote recovery, and he was recovering, though mind and body had each received a deadening shock. It was not so much what he had endured himself, though that would ever leave its mark; but the sight of comrade or friend in the agony of death by the clutch of greedy shark, or glassy over-closing wave, was, and he sometimes feared always would be, vividly present to him. Body and mind at first took refuge in torpor, and refused to suffer more; and so for nearly a week his days and nights were spent in this state of semi-consciousness.

But how could he have been better placed than he was when his mind did begin to claim its right to be of this world? He could be lifted on to a sofa, and lie in the cool verandah till late at night, and watch the flowers growing almost visibly, and the birds hopping within reach of his hand in perfect good fellowship—for they remembered no outrage and dreaded no familiarity—and he could follow the course of the sun as it moved from tree to tree and branch to branch, and the leaves of the “silver” tree flickering and spark-

ing in the soft balmy breeze, which played on his own face and seemed to promise him renewed health and gladness in life. Sometimes he saw his hostess, and was conscious of the charm of her silent sympathy; or his host or Dudley Wentworth came and sat by him: he was pleased to see them when they were there, but hardly seemed to miss them when they went. The past was left unspoken of by all, and gradually he became himself once more. He had hurt his shoulder against a spar, and it was still too painful to allow of his dressing so as to join the family circle; indeed, it seemed unlikely that he would be able to do so before the steamboat came which was to bear the Wentworths back to England.

If ever he was well enough to form such a wish, fate was kind to him, for just before the boat came, Dudley, now more left to himself than he had been before there were so many sick people to attend to, made an engagement with some friends to have a run into the interior to try for a little leopard-hunting, or just one shot at a lion for the honour of old England; and he begged Audrey to wait until he came

back, and went off. Whenever Dudley wanted anything done, he never confessed to the weakness of having a strong wish on the subject ; he always found some weighty reason to prove that the course he wished to take was the only one it was wise and right to adopt, and then settled the matter from high motives. This time it was, in his opinion, advisable to wait a little longer, because if they did so they would secure very agreeable companions for the homeward voyage. The party going inland consisted of two sons of the Bishop of Tomatoland, and a son and a nephew of General Sir David Nithisdale's ; the latter intimate friends of the Wentworths when in India. The older members of these families would remain in Cape Town waiting for the young people's return. Would Audrey wait for Dudley ? It would not be for long, he said, and it would be a thousand pities not to delay a little and secure such very delightful travelling companions for so tedious a voyage ; so, if she could but bear the postponement of her journey patiently, he would fill up the time by this hunting expedition,

and then they would all return to England together.

Audrey never opposed any of Dudley's plans, and had no difficulty in being patient, for, in real truth, she wanted to stay until she could be certain Mr. Templemore was well again. She dreaded the idea of leaving the Cape while he was still so ill. She had, since Bellosguardo was turned into a hospital, had many an hour of solitude, for Mrs. Armitage was devoted to her numerous patients, and did not allow any one to help her to nurse them. But Audrey's spare time had been fully occupied in raising Mr. Templemore to the rank of a hero. He was on his way to fight for his country when this horror came upon him—his escape had been marvellous, his endurance magnificent. It was impossible for her not to admire him—difficult for her not to think of him more than it was wise to do. She had liked him very much that evening at the ball—but if he had made his way safely to the frontier, she would soon have forgotten all his complimentary speeches, and have lost remem-

brance of his handsome face, contenting herself with a passing exclamation on hearing of his great deeds in battle (for she was sure he would do great deeds)—“ Ah, I danced with him at the Cape ; ” but as it was, he was a brilliant young hero, struck down but not overcome by fate, and all her womanly instincts of desire to watch over him, to help to soothe his pain, were awakened and could not be gratified. She was pining with a desire to do something for him, but had never been able to do one thing but steal out on the verandah early in the morning, before any of the shutters were opened, to tie up some branches of the granadilla, which had dropped out of their place, on to a part of the trellis where he would see them from his sofa. They looked very pretty when she had arranged them, and she retreated softly, thinking, “ the chance was they might take his eye.”

She was a very timid, maidenly little person, very much afraid of being laughed at for the enthusiasm she felt, but quite too much possessed by it to be entirely able to conceal it,

had any one been constantly with her to watch her ; but she hid herself away from all in the garden, calling to mind each feature of a face which had, since the time when she first saw it, grown so suddenly and strangely interesting to her, and sometimes catching a distant glimpse of Mr. Templemore lying on his sofa in the verandah, helpless and in pain. This sight always roused her loving pity more and more—the contrast was so great from the buoyant light-heartedness which had struck her so much in him at their first meeting. Let it be well understood that nearly all her admiration for him sprang from an unbounded faculty of hero-worship. She was not yet what is generally called in love with him, but in a very fervent state of intellectual admiration. If he had asked her to be his wife, she would have said “Yes” unhesitatingly ; not because she loved him so much, but because he had suffered so much that it was her duty, and that of all other women, to be ready to obey his lightest wish—but the thought of that never so much as crossed her mind. How could a splendid, beautiful young hero bestow

a thought on her, except because he was courteous to all women? She gathered the loveliest flowers she could find, and wished she might send them to him; firmly resolved she would, and then always laid them aside: she never had the courage to do it. She did not ask many questions about him; she avoided the part of the garden near the verandah where he lay; but when she caught sight of him from afar, she sometimes stood for a moment, wishing all blessings might light upon that bowed head, and picturing the splendid and noble life he would one day lead in regions far removed from herself. Before all this had happened, she had, if she thought of him at all, thought of him only as a possible partner at balls at home, or a pleasant companion in picnic rambles; but now that he had proved himself such a hero, she felt he was lifted far above herself and all such frivolous pleasures—the partner of generals in action, the sharer of grave deliberations—and if she pictured him at a ball, it was to see the crowds falling away respectfully before him as he entered the room.

If she had not kept all these her thoughts so very much to herself, she might have seen them held to the cold light of reason, and have chanced to be told that all Mr. Templemore had done after the ship sank had been in obedience to an instinct of self-preservation common to all, and that his previous heroism had been equalled by every soldier and sailor there, not one of whom but had shown himself heroic and obedient to the heart's core. And, in truth, the shipwreck of the *Britomart* was no common shipwreck, but one which the noble conduct of those who suffered by it was destined to render memorable as a matter of national pride. There had been no panic, no crowding to the boats, no frenzied competition for life in the interval between the ship's striking and her going down, but, in obedience to the orders of their commanding officer, the women and children had been placed in the boats and rowed away to a safe distance, and then those men, six hundred strong, had fallen into rank on the deck as if on parade, and so awaited the end.

Brian Templemore was to Audrey the repre-

sentative of all this courage, endurance, and suffering, and in her innermost heart she never doubted that, where all had been noble and brave, he had been pre-eminently so, and had even owed his escape to that superiority. But she cherished her belief in secret, and wandered under the shadow of the oak trees with no pining for the statelier trees of Minsteracres; saw camellias and myrtles, oleanders and pomegranates, growing in tropical luxuriance of leaf and flower, and sometimes half shuddered when she thought how dull and cold she should feel in the park at home, with a six weeks' voyage between her and him she revered so much. And he would be exposed to danger then, for he had told Mrs. Armitage that, as soon as he was well enough to be of use, he should at once repair to head-quarters at King William's Town.

He was getting rapidly well now, and every morning was laid in the shady corner of the verandah, where he could indulge in a languid enjoyment of convalescence without the effort of having to seem well. On one of

these mornings he saw Audrey sitting under some trees on the other side of the lawn, with Mrs. Armitage by her side. They were both dressed in white—for it was January, and the thermometer quite a hundred in the shade, and there was a scorching north wind; but he did not feel the heat where he was, and found a pleasant and perfectly sufficient amount of occupation in watching how the tiny spots of sunlight which pierced their way through the foliage slid in shining patterns over their dresses, and in trying to remember Audrey's features accurately, or admiring the shape of her head, with a faint sense of wonder all the time that he was still in a world of this kind, and able to take note of such things. They were reading when he first began to look at them, but they could not be reading now. They were looking at each other as if they were talking, and he was almost sure they had neither of them turned a page for a long time. Now they saw he was watching them, and waved their handkerchiefs; he was better to-day and wished they would come, but not well enough to feel any disappointment when he

saw it was not their intention to do so ; all he did was to turn languidly away to watch the turtle-doves fluttering about in cooing pairs in the trees on each side of the lawn. “How tired those birds must be of each other’s talk !” thought he, as the monotonous sound became oppressive ; “and yet one tires of being quite alone,” he added, and again he looked at Audrey. That ball where he had met her seemed as if it must have taken place years ago, he had lived through so much since. He remembered how sweet he had thought her then, and how glad he had been to find they were to be such near neighbours in England ; and now the same roof covered them. It was rather strange she had never once come near enough to the verandah to say a friendly word to him ! He did not know that her very consciousness of anxiety on his account had been the cause of her keeping away from him—that, and two or three words of raillery from her friend, Mrs. Armitage, who was quick to see the change in her.

Presently his hostess came to him ; and then,

for the hundredth time, he tried to thank her for her generous hospitality, and then he again looked across the lawn at Audrey.

“Will Miss Wentworth never come to speak to a fellow? She might. I am quite presentable, am I not, Mrs. Armitage?”

“Quite. But she must not come yet; you are to be kept very quiet, you know.”

He looked rather wistfully and said, “I wish she would. It would do me good; indeed, I think I am nearly well.”

“You will soon get downstairs, I hope; but until you are stronger, you must let me be supreme.”

“She is coming!” he exclaimed, for at this moment she shut her book and rose. He looked full of expectation. Up to this time he had not shown so much interest in anything.

“You foolish boy!” said Mrs. Armitage, “you surely don’t suppose she is going to walk across the lawn in that virulent sunshine. She will come back quite another way, under the trees.”

“Will she pass by here?”

“No ; but I will make her a sign to do so,” said she, relenting.

She did so, but for a time it was uncertain whether Audrey would obey it or not, for all the lawn lay exposed to the direct beams of the mid-day sun, and all around it was a thick belt of vividly green trees, into the shadow of which she made her way, and soon was lost to view. Presently she came and stood below the verandah, looking very sweet and pretty, with her head thrown back to see him, and her friendly little speech of congratulation trembling on her lips. There was no self-consciousness about her now, and once brought face to face with her hero, she forgot all her admiration and worship of him and his deeds, and spoke just as any rather timid girl might speak when suddenly called on to play a grown-up part away from the support of those on whom she usually relied. He turned himself round to see her better, until he hurt his suffering shoulder. But what a sweet young face it was which looked up to him ! Just the face the Leslie of this present day would delight to paint, full of tender beauty

and dignity. The heat, or more probably the thought that she was going to see him at last, had given her a pretty colour, and the sun half shone through the wide brim of a large Leghorn garden-hat, and cast a mellow reflected light on her face. What a depth of truth and kindness there was in her steady grey eyes as she told him how pleased she was to see him again; and how dainty and trim she was in her snowy dress, with its coquettish bows of black velvet! He had no idea she was so beautiful—that any one so beautiful could exist! And then her manner was so charming, for behind a certain girlish shyness appeared such a wealth of kind-heartedness, that he felt drawn to her at once.

“Won’t you come into the verandah? it is shady here,” said he eagerly, for he could not bear to think that another moment might end the interview.

Audrey looked doubtfully at Mrs. Armitage.

“Another day perhaps,” said that lady. “Remember, he is not by any means well yet.”

Audrey nodded and glided away.

“You *are* cruel!” said he half pettishly, “it could not have hurt me. Why did you say that?”

But when Mrs. Armitage heard his eager tone, and saw a flush of vexation on his pale face, she was not sorry she had listened to the voice of prudence; for before Dudley went away he had made her promise not to let Audrey get into any flirtations, and she began to think from Mr. Templemore’s manner that her promise might entail upon her something more than the mere pronounciation of words binding herself to vigilance. But if he was vexed with her for depriving him of a pleasure, he said nothing to prove it, but threw himself back as if seeking rest; and if he was musing in secret on Audrey’s many attractions, he did not refuse to lend his ears to other subjects of conversation.

CHAPTER V.

“La présence d’un tiers suffit-elle pour empêcher l’amour de naître ? ”

“What! do I love her,
That I desire to see her face again ? ”

SHAKESPEARE.

DUDLEY might have been three weeks away, during the greater part of which time Mr. Templemore had been downstairs; Dudley might have prospered in his hunting of leopards and other pleasingly animated *feræ naturæ* which make their home in Southern Africa, but a subtler and more dangerous sportsman still had been engaged in the chase at Bellosguardo, the famous and redoubtable Dan Cupid. What his weapons had been it would have been hard to say, but they had assuredly done their work, and Mr. Templemore was hopelessly and irretrievably in love with Miss Audrey Wentworth. Was it simply pro-

pinquity which had brought this about, or was it that he, coming back as it were from the desolate shores of death, loved the first of this world's angels who met his sight on his return? It certainly was not love given in answer to love, for whatever feeling Audrey might have in her heart for him, she hid it there. It might have been born of pique, for never had any girl avoided him as she had done.

No matter how it had taken root in his heart, the feeling was there; but he concealed it so thoroughly at first that Mrs. Armitage, after a careful inspection of his manner and a glad recognition of Audrey's indifference, decided that she had been a foolish woman ever to expect those two to fall in love with each other. She certainly had expected this, and expected it with some uneasiness, and it was not unreasonable that she should do so; for given a pretty girl with a strong tendency to hero-worship, and given a handsome young hero just recovering from a dangerous illness, with his right arm in a sling, and various other claims to be made much of by

the feminine part of the community during a gradual convalescence, what more natural than such a result, and what more difficult under such circumstances than to keep the promise Dudley had exacted before he left, that she would allow no flirtations while he was away? Now, though she often laughed at Dudley, when he confided to her his views with respect to his sister's future husband, because in all his conversations on the subject he showed so plainly that Audrey's own choice and inclinations in the matter went for so very little in comparison with what he thought was advisable, she could not but sympathize in some degree with the repugnance she knew he would feel to the thought of her ever caring in any serious way for Mr. Templemore. And yet their objections would be based on entirely different grounds. Dudley would dislike such a thing because, though the only son of a well-to-do Yorkshire squire, Brian Templemore had neither private fortune nor profession, but was entirely dependent on his father, who allowed him what was all very well for a bachelor, but nothing for

a man to marry on—and on Dudley's brain was deeply imprinted the maxim that money had a right to expect money in return, and in this case there was no prospect of any for many years to come.

Mrs. Armitage held a more generous and sensible creed, but much as she admired young Mr. Templemore, she did not quite like him, nor did she think he was the kind of man whom it would be well for Audrey to marry. She was a girl who would give her whole heart to any one she loved, and ever after spend her life in trying to make him happy; but if she had the misfortune to choose some one whose love was of a less lasting nature than her own, no power on earth could save her from being an unhappy woman all the days of her married life, for so was she made. Mrs. Armitage had no great faith in Brian Templemore's proving himself to be "the right man." She knew him to be impulsive, she had a suspicion he was unstable, and before he came downstairs she had more than once wondered what she should do if her two young visitors fell in

love with each other while the protecting force of Dudley's presence was wanting to her. It was a mighty relief to her when Brian was at last well enough to leave his room and she saw him in Audrey's company, and observed that the two whom she had been tormenting herself about, because she imagined them to be mutually attracted to each other, did not seem to seek or care for each other's society at all. The relief was great, but the surprise was much greater.

It was Audrey who set the example of a certain reserve, not to say stiffness, which was the most marked feature of their intercourse. She was always kind and courteous, but nevertheless she plainly showed that she did not want him to follow her when she went to read in the garden, or took a book and retired into one of the empty sitting-rooms. In the evening there was not much opportunity for anything but general conversation, for they were seldom alone. Officers from the town, strangers from India, came to spend an hour or two, and every one and any one could win her to talk more readily than he could.

Mrs. Armitage might be content with Audrey's demeanour, and give up watching over her: Mr. Brian Templemore was not, and he watched her more than ever. When he first came downstairs he had enjoyed the idea of a protracted convalescence, with his kind hostess to nurse him and her beautiful visitor to flit about near his sofa, to read perhaps, or write for him; but no such good luck fell to his lot, for when Mrs. Armitage saw that Audrey needed no looking after, she gave herself up heart and soul to nursing one of the poor sailors who did, and Mr. Templemore was for once in his life rather neglected. He felt it very keenly. He had always been the spoilt child of his family, humoured in every wish of his heart where it was possible to humour him, and this sudden desertion of him by those on whom he had counted for amusement, struck with a cold chill on his sensitive and exacting nature. He followed Audrey with his eyes, irritated sometimes beyond endurance by her indifference, and still more irritated with himself because he could not return it as he wished; he tried,

but it was impossible—she was so very, very pretty and charming! He never tried to prevail on her to stay with him—he preferred the luxury of a grievance; and Audrey, though she sometimes thought he must be rather lonely, could not bring herself to change her habits, or imagine that her presence could make any difference to his comfort. And so it went on, until a day came when Mrs. Armitage, lulled to complete security, went so far in her confidence in their indifference to each other as to feel a pang of regret because these two young people, who might have done something towards enlivening each other's loneliness during the many hours when her attendance on her little hospital obliged her to be away from them, kept so determinedly apart. She had found Brian Templemore trying to write a letter; though she was in a hurry, something in his face struck her, for she said—

“What is it, Mr. Templemore?”

“Nothing,” he replied, “at least nothing but this, that I want to write to my father, and my arm hurts me to-day. Never mind, I will make a short letter do.”

“But, my dear boy, don’t you try to write at all if your arm is painful. I will ask Miss Wentworth to come and write it for you. I would do it myself, but I must go back to old Davie; he is really very ill to-day. I ought not to leave him, but I am sure Miss Wentworth will do it. Look, there she is in the garden.”

And far away in the garden, Brian saw through the clear air something which looked like a flash of a sunlit dress, or was it a dense mass of white lilies? He thought it was her dress, but the bright sunshine which lay between them dazzled his eyes. Then he remembered how quickly she had left the room that morning after he had entered it, and turned away as if no help could possibly come from that quarter.

“She does not want to be bothered,” said he; “I won’t ask her. I had rather write it myself if it hurt me twice as much.”

“I will come back then, if I can, and see what I can do for you myself,” said Mrs. Armitage, going.

When she did come, an hour later, what

she saw was this : Audrey sitting at a table near Mr. Templemore with a well-filled sheet of letter paper before her, her eyes bent on it, and her ears dutifully taking in all that the said Mr. Templemore, who was reclining in a very comfortable easy chair, chose to dictate to her. The Venetian blinds were all drawn down, the room full of cool shade, and he looked as happy as possible, though on other occasions there was no one thing which excited such feelings of abhorrence in his mind as the act of letter-writing.

This was a change, and by no means a very prudent one. The truth was Mr. Brian Templemore had done a very wily thing ; he had gone to Audrey, had looked rather dolorous, and adroitly turning his knowledge of feminine nature to account, had told her that it hurt him very much when he wandered about the garden in search of her, for he was not yet well enough to go so far, and yet sometimes, when left alone too long, the mental suffering he underwent was so great that any bodily pain was preferable to sitting still and struggling with it—that he could

not sit still then ; he felt he must get near some one to escape his own thoughts.

A deep blush of self-reproach covered Audrey's face, which was now turned on him in pitying kindness, as she reflected on the dismal memories which must haunt him.

"How very thoughtless I have been !" said she ; "how very selfish ! I ought to have stayed with you when Mrs. Armitage was forced to go away—but I thought you were writing this morning."

"I was, but I could not finish my letter. My shoulder is not so well as it ought to be. I was half inclined to venture to ask you, Miss Wentworth, to write a few lines for me, just to finish it. It ought to go ; my people will be anxious to hear from me, but I hardly like to ask such a thing. I know it is a bore."

"Oh no ! I should be so glad to do it. I was only reading. I feel ashamed that I did not think of this myself. Let us go ; I am so pleased to do it for you."

She pressed her services upon him, for he stood as if he were hesitating ; but he was

only looking at her, and thinking that the plainest woman in the world would be beautiful, if only she had such a good, kind heart to shine through her eyes as Audrey had. And then they turned to go into the house ; and after this, poor little Audrey, who had only kept out of the way because she loved him so much that she was ashamed of herself, and who reproached herself bitterly for being so unkind as not to remember his lame arm, and all that he had had to endure, presented herself, pen in hand, every morning to ask if there were no more letters which she could write for him. No matter whether there was an opportunity of sending them at once or not, he never refused her offers. He could not ; it was so delightful to have her sitting by him, and to know that she would stay as long as he had energy and invention left to dictate one sentence more ; and never in Templemore's life had he been such a good correspondent. Friends of his youth found themselves remembered ; unattractive maiden aunts and cousins blessed the dear boy's heart for thinking of them when he was so

ill, so far from home, and at a time, too, when he might be sure that any one would be flattered and pleased to have a letter from one who had gone through so much. Warm feelings sprang up in his favour in estranged bosoms, and these showers of letters produced a fortune for him in the future, and two fifty-pound notes in the present. And, oh! but they were stupid compositions; for nothing but Audrey was in his head, and he spun them out to the very best of his ability with his eyes fixed on her, and his heart full of love for her; and all the time she wrote she looked so kind and pleased to help him. Ah! never would he see any one so gentle and dear as Audrey!

He did not dare to tell her so; he was not at all sure of her. He dreaded lest she should again begin to avoid him, and leave him for hours and hours in solitude. Now that she was so sweet and docile, not for worlds would he disturb his present happiness.

Not that he had much opportunity of speaking his mind, or any part of it, to her except in the presence of a third person; for this change

had not escaped the observation of Mrs. Armitage, who had suited her conduct to the emergency, and mounted a strong guard over the fair scribe, giving all her time to bearing them company, and all her mind to wishing Dudley back. She confided to her husband how anxious she was about the young folks. He thought there was nothing in it. "Mr. Templemore watched Audrey incessantly, it is true; but do not the eyes of all people naturally and instinctively seek out the pleasantest object in the room to rest upon?" Mrs. Armitage shook her head. Her husband was in his office all the morning and did not see them: and Mr. Templemore's eyes did not rest much; they worshipped her! If only Dudley would come and look after his own beautiful heiress!

Before Dudley did come, she resolved to speak to Mr. Templemore, and went to seek him for that purpose. He was at that moment speaking to himself in a remote part of the garden, and she could not find him. She knew much of his family history, many of his hopes, more of his disappointments. The

greatest of these had been his father's refusal to let him go into the army. He was an only son, and his life was thought too precious to risk in such a profession. This being the case, it seemed wonderfully inconsistent to let him go on such an irregular kind of warlike expedition as that against the Caffres; but when she made that remark to Mr. Templemore the younger, he explained that his father declared that he had suffered so much from his son's perpetual regrets and reproaches because he had been kept out of the only profession he cared for, that he had made up his mind to let him go on this one thoroughly uncomfortable expedition, in the hope that after it he might hear no more repining after a soldier's life. But he did not tell her that there had been another and yet more cogent reason for his father's giving his consent so readily to his departure. The poor squire hated the idea of his going, and dreaded the contingent dangers, but he wanted to get him out of harm's way; the harm in this instance taking the form of a very pretty girl, niece to the housekeeper of old Mr. Philip Wentworth,

of Minsteracres, whom young Brian had seen, had fallen violently in love with, had met secretly in the park, and actually wanted to marry. This, his most insane proposition, as his father called it, had brought down floods of wrath on young Templemore; for he was only twenty-two, had no profession, not a penny in the world but his allowance, and a large bundle of unpaid bills—angry demands, urgent requests, humble petitions for the payment of which formed the staple of his breakfast reading. Now, this would not have mattered so much; but Templemore *père* had a larger bundle still, and though they all got paid in time, a good deal of thought had to be given to how that was to be managed and which it would be well to take first, and money was so “tight” with all at Breamore that it was quite out of the question to let Master Brian marry any one, however pretty, unless she had a fortune. Besides, a housekeeper’s niece! The line must be drawn somewhere; an ancient and honourable family was not to be disgraced in that way, even if the aspirant after matrimony had had anything to live on!

The worthy housekeeper at Minsteracres had been spoken to ; she was quite as angry at the idea of such a thing as the squire himself. She ranged herself on the side of order at once, and declared it to be her intention to keep her niece out of "harm's way" too ; only the squire must put a stop to Mr. Brian "following after her." The squire promised to do that ; but neither he nor Mrs. Pemberton, the housekeeper, had been perfectly successful in carrying out their design of parting the young people, who, seeing that the gardens of Breamore and the park of Minsteracres were in one corner only divided by a high hedge of infirm and meagre growth towards the lower part, quite enjoyed showing what faithful and determined lovers could do in the way of seeing each other. Their meetings had at last been discovered, and then the squire had been obliged to throw himself on his son's mercy, for repairing the fences was not enough ; and Brian Templemore, touched by his father's earnestness and anxiety, had given his solemn promise to meet Polly no more. Old Mrs. Pemberton had smiled grimly when she heard

of this promise being exacted and given, and had delivered herself of the opinion, based on professional experience and knowledge, that promises and pie-crusts were made to be broken—adding, however, that as sure as her name was Susan Pemberton, she would see to this one being kept; and thereupon she shut Miss Polly into her own room till she could be trusted “to go about her work quietly”—for Miss Polly was domestic servant at Ministeracres.

The imprisonment did not last long. Polly “came to,” owned she had “looked too high,” gave her word to seek no further meeting with Mr. Templemore, and kept it. This softened the squire’s wrath, and he condescended to explain that he made no opposition to marriage in general; that if Brian would go and choose a well-brought-up, respectable girl, with a good fortune of her own (for without that he could marry no one in his lifetime), he would find that he did not; but that he wanted neither cooks nor kitchen-maids in his house, except in their proper places. And so the matter rested a while; but from old

experience of Brian's difficulties in avoiding temptation when it came in his way, and as there were such facilities for its doing so, so long as Breamore and Minsteracres stood where they did, and each held a despairing lover within its walls, the squire was anything but averse to giving his son leave to go abroad a while, hoping everything from time and distance.

While Mrs. Armitage was looking for Mr. Templemore, he was walking up and down the oak avenue, wondering what "his people" would say if he got engaged to Miss Wentworth—most likely that he was a thousand times luckier than he deserved to be, for she was good and beautiful and rich; not that he had ever thought of her riches when he first fell in love with her, but such details as the fact that a bride elect has a thousand a year of her own add a wonderful grace to the narrative, when you are unfolding the story of your love to your anxious relatives—all clouds clear away from their brows, as they fervently feel you will be happy, and wish you joy. If only he could be sure of her consent,

all the rest would be easy. He had watched her very closely for some days, and at times he had dared to hope, for in spite of her shyness, there was a look in her eyes sometimes which told him he was more to her than most of her friends were.

He wished he could sometimes see her alone. It was impossible to speak freely with Mrs. Armitage always there ; he supposed she disapproved of his feeling for Audrey—from something she had said that very morning, he was almost sure she did. Surely this time people would not begin to interfere as soon as he admired a girl !

That is how poor little Polly came to his mind. From the far background of long past times—for it seemed years since he had left England—rose up the image of Polly Pember-ton stealing under the green trees to meet him, all in a tremor with fear of her aunt, and pleasure at seeing him. Forgotten as she now was—for he had hardly once thought of her since the shipwreck—he could not help tossing a tender thought in her direction as he remembered what a dear little soul she

had been ; but it was his duty to forget her, he said, and perhaps it was, but he need not have forgotten her so quickly, and for another. Duty would assuredly have had a much less firm adherent if Audrey had not come in his way, for he had really cared very much for Polly, but, as he said to himself, what was the use of his caring for her, or for any one, unless his father approved and would help him to marry ? “ Beggars could not be choosers,” said a homely proverb much in vogue in his own county, so he proceeded at once to sweep out and garnish his heart for the occupation of a new mistress.

CHAPTER VI.

“Bin doch ein arm unwissend Kind,
Begreife nicht was er an mir find't.”

FAUST.

DUDLEY had returned, and had now been three days at Bellosguardo, and in one more he and Audrey were to set out for England. It was wonderful how his arrival had changed every one's habits; no more quiet mornings in the library with Audrey and Mrs. Armitage for Brian Templemore, no more quiet for any one.

Dudley was a most exacting brother. He carried Audrey off to Cape Town, to help to choose things to take home; he made her come and sit with him while he did this, and just wait a moment while he did that, and consult with him about something else all the day long; and never for one single second let anything she might suggest have

any weight with him, or affect any of his decisions on any one point. But he liked having her with him all the same; and he so effectually parted her from Mr. Templemore, that Mrs. Armitage could not but laugh, and wish she had had the benefit of his assistance during these past weeks, when everything which it had been so difficult for her to do would have come so easily to him. She had really been in rather a difficult position, and if she had not had such a strong feeling of affection for Audrey, she would have let matters arrange themselves, and trusted to all being for the best; but as she herself thought it a very rash thing for her to engage herself to Mr. Templemore, she had done her best to stop the offer being made. Once, when she thought it seemed imminent, she had resolved to speak to her so as to secure her against being taken unawares. But the child looked so happy, so young, so peacefully unconscious of life in its difficult aspects, that she did not like to be the first to open her eyes to the fact that it was not one long day's delight in a high-

walled paradise, but a perpetual struggle with chance and change, and time and fate. The only approach to a warning she had been able to utter was a gentle—

“My dear Audrey, if you were to do such a thing as lose your heart, and Dudley did not like the man you had given it to, what would you do?”

Audrey had looked up, and her face had shown so plainly that the idea of any difference of opinion between herself and her brother was as new as painful, that Mrs. Armitage had immediately relented and said—

“Don’t look so miserable, dear child, it is never likely to happen.”

“It would break my heart, I think, if it did; at least, if Dudley were really angry with me,” said Audrey; and she hung her head, and was silent and full of thought.

And Mrs. Armitage had been too great a coward to say more; but she had taken an opportunity of telling Mr. Templemore that if he really meant to join the troops as a volunteer as soon as he was able, he must not in any way seek to bind Audrey to him now; that

the poor child would, if she accepted him, fret herself into an illness at the mere thought of the danger he would be in, cry her eyes out whenever she knew a battle was expected, and lie awake at night every time the mail was due. Dudley would be cross with her for worrying herself and him about it, and so she would lose her only support. Very reluctantly he gave the required promise ; and now hovered about his lady-love, recognizing the prudence of Mrs. Armitage's conditions, but chafing under the sense of being tongue-tied, and at times feeling his secret oozing from him even in spite of himself.

But when Dudley came, all need for self-restraint was removed. Was there ever such an obnoxious brother? Ubiquitous, exacting, insatiable ! Mr. Templemore had not had three words with Audrey alone ever since his arrival. And this was the last day !

It began with some arrangements for the journey, and Dudley made his sister pack some tiny treasures amongst his recent acquisitions for him, and sat over her while she did it ; and write a list of the prettiest flowers

in the garden, roots of which he wished to have forwarded to him in due time, with a view to embellishing Minsteracres. Would he never be done? She must be tired to death! Mr. Templemore fretted and fidgeted, and Dudley the exacting still found more and more things for his sister to do; and Mr. Templemore counted the hours, and watched the timepiece, bitterly conscious that in twenty-four hours more she would be on her way to another quarter of the globe.

At last Dudley took her into the garden to hunt for some flower-seeds, or on some equally trivial and ridiculous errand, which Mr. Templemore thought might very well have been left undone—whereas he himself had so many things which he must say to her. He hated Dudley Wentworth for his conduct on these days. He had never liked him from the first. He had always thought him a cool, calculating fellow, selfish to the backbone. Now he was more sure of it than ever, and told Mrs. Armitage so. She only laughed at him, and this made him express his feelings of dislike with double force.

“He is a fellow who, if his sister had only a shilling in the world, would get her to give him tenpence of it. I hate him! I wonder she does not see what a selfish animal he is! I can’t imagine how she can be so blind; I believe she cares far more for him than for any one—I really do.”

Mrs. Armitage did not say she did not, because she thought it was quite natural she should do so, and that exasperated him the more, especially as he caught distant glimpses of the two walking about together; Audrey flitting about Dudley, and looking perfectly happy with him.

“Look, he is leaving her now!” exclaimed Mrs. Armitage. “Come, now, you need not abuse him so much.”

“Only for a minute or so, you may be sure; he can’t do without her for long—he makes a perfect slave of her!”

But Dudley came in and asked if he could be conveyed to the town; he had half-an-hour’s shopping to do. Could he have a carriage?

Mr. Templemore would have liked to pro-

vide even a regal conveyance to get rid of him, but less sufficed, and presently they heard him drive off.

Up to that time, Mr. Templemore had stayed quietly by Mrs. Armitage's side, as if to make sure of his enemy's absence; but now he got up, and, with an awkward consciousness, said he should take a turn in the garden.

“One moment, Mr. Templemore—you won't forget your promise to me?”

“Oh dear, Mrs. Armitage, how hard all of you are on me! I'd give anything to be set free from that promise. She will see some one, as soon as ever she gets back, who will want to marry her, and I shall lose her to a certainty. Let me just tell her what I feel for her; I won't ask her what she thinks about me. Let me just tell her that if only I get safely home, I mean at once to go to her and ask her to be my wife. That's not offering to her, or asking her to engage herself to me.”

“Much too like it to be allowed. No; as I told you before, she would, if she cares for you,

be wretched every moment until you return. You don't know Audrey. She is the most tender-hearted, nervous little goose of a creature ; she would be miserable, I tell you, and you are not to do it ! ”

“ But it is very nice to have people unhappy about one. ”

“ What selfish love ! It might kill her ! ”

“ Creighton's done it,” said he, alluding to a piece of news he had heard that very morning.

“ No, you must not in any way try to engage her, either directly or by implication. Renew your promise, or I shall think it my duty to go with you to her now. If you do as I wish, you may go and have a quiet last talk. Come, you owe me something, for I have not told her brother anything about it, or you may be very sure he would not have left you this opportunity. ”

“ I believe, Mrs. Armitage, in your heart you dislike that fellow Dudley as much as I do,” said Templemore, wondering why she had kept this from him, and thinking that must be the reason.

“No; I have not told him, because if you are prudent, and don’t betray what you feel to her, there is no need. I do not want him to know, because if he does not approve of it, he might worry her all the way home—you know his way.”

“Why should he disapprove? It would be like his impudence to do it. If I am not as good in every way as he is, it is something new to me! I should like particularly to know in what kind of a position he was a year ago, before he had the luck to have Minsteracres left to him?”

Mrs. Armitage was silent; she herself thought there was a great deal of the arrogance of the *nouveau riche* about Dudley, but she was quite sure he would oppose Audrey’s marriage with Mr. Templemore.

“He has got his estate now, and I have not; but some of these days my position will be every bit as good as his, and better too, for mine will come to me by direct inheritance.”

“But now?” said Mrs. Armitage doubtfully. “That would be the great point with

Dudley. He expects his sister to marry an earl at the very least."

"First catch your hare!" cried Templemore with a sneer. "Not but that his sister might marry any one, but I want her to marry me; and if only I could get her consent, Master Dudley might be very well satisfied with me for a brother-in-law. My father would make it all straight for me now, and when he's gone, poor fellow, I should have Breamore." And he rose to seek Audrey.

"And you promise?" persisted Mrs. Armitage.

"Yes, if I must!" said he unwillingly; but there was no going against any one who had been so kind to him, and who was so much attached to Audrey. "Mind," he added, "I almost hate you for asking such a thing."

Audrey was sitting on a low garden seat overwhelmed with melancholy. So far Dudley's numerous claims on her time had been of service to her, for if left to herself she would only have made herself miserable

because she was going away. Ever since Dudley had left her, her eyes had been dwelling on the garden lying before her in all its splendour of sunlit flowers—flowers which crowded into existence in a profusion she knew she should miss in the home which now seemed to her so cold and so northerly. Here all was bright, and warm, and gay; life glided peacefully on, and dear friends shared happiness with her. At Minsteracres she remembered great comfortless rooms bare of society; a vast dull (now she thought it so) park, where the trees were stripped of leaves, and the ground damp and chill for months and months together; and there she would have to shiver alone, cut off from the sight of the Armitages, torn away from one yet dearer! It seemed like giving up life itself to leave Bellosguardo and go on that long, long voyage over a sea the very sight of which, after the disaster of the *Britomart*, she could not encounter without a shudder. And then each hour of the day would hurry her so much further away from all she held so dear. What a traitor she felt to Dudley when she found such thoughts

as these gaining mastery over her! What a traitor she constantly felt to him! for now she could not bear to hear him dwelling on the beauties of Minsteracres. What beauty could there be in dull green trees to one who had got to know camellia trees twenty-five feet high?—covered with blossom too! She knew the kind of camellias they grew in England—scrubby, stunted things, which drop their buds just when they have led you to expect a few shabby flowers. She knew their heaths too, and compared them with those which grew wild here, whose varieties were legion, whose colours so manifold. And everything else would be in the same proportion; she would exchange what was to her an earthly paradise for the discourtesies and sterilities of a northern climate. Please God, she would bear it patiently. She only hoped she should be able to hide what she felt from Dudley, who would have been offended by any disparagement of Minsteracres, nay, hurt if she did not share in his enthusiasm. And then, heartsick all the time, she owned to herself that it was hypocrisy to maintain even to

herself that it was such trifles as changes of climate or scenery which disturbed her peace. She knew as a certain truth, that if she could but carry all the inmates of the house before her to England with her, that Minsteracres, dull as it now appeared by anticipation, would soon shine out with a radiance of joy which the sight of myriads of stunted camellias and fallen buds, or spiteful heaths which would not live, would have no power to dim.

“It is a horrible thing,” thought she, “to care so much for any one as I do for these people here. One ought never to get into such a state as I am—it is perfect bondage; for I feel as if I could not be happy away from them, and never could care for any new friends. This life of mine is strange. It is just as if I had begun a long railway journey in a wonderfully beautiful country, and then I had been suddenly whisked into a tunnel; I feel now as if my life were going to be passed in one long tunnel, nothing else but this tunnel for ever. There may be an end to it, but if I am to enter it I don’t seem to care what lies there. I feel as if all I could do would be

to lie back and bear as quietly as I can the dull black monotony of what is before me. Only, thank God! I have got Dudley still, and, thank God! I'm not quite such a wretch as to show him what I think, though I am bad enough to feel it. I don't deserve to have Dudley."

That had been her self-accusing cry for many a day now, ever since it had dawned upon her that she was beginning to care so much for this stranger that Dudley's possession of the chief place in her heart was menaced. That had been a very painful discovery to her, but she had made it in time, and she would always love him better than any one in the whole world. "And it is nonsense of me trying to persuade myself that I do not," said she somewhat proudly, with one of those sudden attempts at a revulsion of feeling so natural to her. "How could I love any one as well as my own brother!"

Even as this thought passed through her mind, she heard a sound which made her heart stand still—footsteps on the gravel behind her; a man's footsteps, and Dudley was at Cape Town.

CHAPTER VII.

“And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.”

TENNYSON.

“On thother part love so constrained him that the power thereof surmounted honour and trouth.”—FROISSART.

It was Mr. Templemore, and he came to her in a state fluctuating between delight at getting the chance of some conversation with her, and vexation at being so tied down by promises to Mrs. Armitage, that he was almost afraid to go near her at all. How was it possible to be alone with Audrey, and on the point of parting with her for months, if not for ever, and avoid telling her he loved her? The fact that Mrs. Armitage had imposed these absurd limitations made him almost ashamed to go near her; it was so absurd to have to seem stupid or apathetic when he longed to bind her to him for ever!

And he half believed he could have done it. Her drooping head, the stillness of her attitude, all showed she was thinking deeply and painfully, and on some subject which her courage shrank from. There was a very fair amount of vanity about Mr. Brian Templemore, and it had sometimes whispered to him that she had a very kind feeling for him.

He went up to her with some hastily invented remark on an unusual effect of sunlight, and dropped down listlessly on the seat at the opposite corner to that she occupied. Her first words showed that she had been thinking of her approaching departure, for she said—

“I suppose you too will soon be leaving Bellosguardo, Mr. Templemore—I think you said so?”

“Yes,” said he; “and in spite of the charm of the place, in spite of the Armitages’ great kindness, I sometimes wish I had gone a month ago.”

Audrey was not the least vain, not the least self-conscious; it never occurred to her to extract a compliment to herself out of his

speech, as some girls might have done. She felt he considered all this past month lost time, and owned to herself that it was natural that a man who had been up shut in a house, with nothing but women for companions till evening, should feel that. She did not speak. She wished he had enjoyed all these bygone days more. She wished that she herself had either not enjoyed them so much, or never had them at all. All her home life in England would henceforth be one long regret for what she had left behind her. Alas! for the boasted inventions of modern times. How happy must our forefathers have been, who spent their lives peacefully in one place, without ever caring to venture farther from home than they could walk or drive! No such rude wrenches as this could have come in their lives. Those they knew and loved when they were all children together lived and died by their sides, whereas she and those she was mourning over would not even have the same sky above them.

They were both silent for a little time, and there was no sound to break the stillness

around them but the cooing of the distant ring-doves, and no movement but the fluttering down to earth of some white-petalled blossom, whose brief life in the sunshine had come to an end. They did not look at each other, but each was deeply conscious the other was there, and this consciousness brought with it such contentment and delight that no words were needed between them. Indeed, their words when spoken were stiff, and cold, and strange compared with the bliss of this mute companionship, when each felt that all that the world held for them of good was there. A silence of this kind becomes so eloquent that those with secrets on their minds do well to break it. Perhaps Brian Templemore felt that he must plunge into conversation of some sort at any cost; it is certain if he had looked in her face after a few minutes more of this, all that he had in his heart must have rushed to his lips.

He did not look; he did not much choose his subject. It was rather an awkward one, but it was one his thoughts had been busy with before, and it bore collaterally upon the sub-

ject of all. It was a piece of news he had heard that morning about a brother officer and a young lady of the colony.

“Creighton has got engaged to Miss Sophy Langenfels. You remember Creighton?”

“Yes, but I don’t know Miss Sophy Langenfels.”

“No? Well, never mind her. But what do you think about his asking her to marry him?”

“But if I don’t know her, how can I have any thoughts about it?”

“Ah! but you know the circumstances. He was taken to their house, poor fellow, after the wreck, and they nursed him, and he is going to marry her.”

For a moment even Audrey paused to consider why she was called upon to have a very pronounced opinion on this very natural event, but she failed to inform herself, and said—

“Is she very nice or pretty?”

“Charming! But that is not the question. Do you think it was wrong of him to propose to her?”

“Wrong! Why?” said Audrey, puzzled.
“Surely not if he liked her.”

“Because,” said he, and he spoke with great constraint, “you see, some people think that when a fellow is going off on a long and dangerous expedition, in which he may very likely come to grief, he has no right to drag any one else into trouble with him—that it would be nobler to hide what he feels, till he sees whether he is coming back or not.”

“Perhaps it would; but then if she cared about him?”

“But don’t you think she would suffer less if he held his tongue—I mean, supposing he was killed? In that case”—he spoke very quickly and nervously, for he saw her eyes fixed earnestly on him—“there would be the slight pain of his going, but in the other she would be in misery every time she thought he was in danger.”

“And he?” said Audrey. “It will surely comfort Mr. Creighton to know the one he loves best loves him in return, and is thinking of him all the time he is away.”

“Oh, by George! no doubt all that will be a fine thing for Creighton. But the question is, ought he not to have done without such

comfort—ought he not to think of what is best for her? What do you think would be best for her, Miss Wentworth?" and he held his breath to wait for her answer.

"But why need I think about it when he has done it? You said they were engaged," said Audrey, who had no idea he had any reason to be anxious for her opinion, and wondered why he was so persistent.

"Oh, when a question is once raised, I like to come to some conclusion about it."

"Then," said Audrey, "if I must give you my ideas on the subject, I think she will be very glad to bear the anxiety the engagement will cause her for the sake of the comfort it will give him."

"But won't it make her any happier?"

"No doubt it will."

"But you think it will make her suffer anxiety?"

"Of course I do. How can she help feeling that?"

"Then I think he might as well have held his tongue," said Mr. Templemore.

"I think not," replied she. "Depend upon

it, she is happier as she is ; besides, if he were to have some bad accident—lose an arm or leg—he might not dare to speak then ; it would be foolish, but he might be afraid, and you see, as it is, it would be all right.”

“ Umph ! ” was Mr. Templemore’s exclamation. But the very next moment he felt the blood rushing to his head and heart, and he wished he had not given that idiotic promise, otherwise he would have taken Audrey at her word and risked all. Her next words chilled him a little.

“ You see, she is not so very, very far from where he will be ; they can hear of each other very often.”

That was true, and that was one of the arguments Mrs. Armitage had used that very morning to damage the value of Mr. Creighton’s case as a precedent. He wished, all things considered, that he had kept off this extremely dangerous ground with Audrey.

There was again a silence. Audrey was the one to break it.

“ You are very brave to go to King William’s Town, Mr. Templemore. If I had

been you, I am afraid I should have considered I had had enough of war and the Cape, and have gone home."

"Think of one's honour," said he; "though, by Jove! if that were out of the question, I am free to confess I should go back to England with you to-morrow."

"I rather dread the journey myself," said Audrey; "I am afraid of——" the sea now, she was going to say, but she checked herself; there are so many things to avoid in the presence of a man who has had his nerves hardly tried.

He made no remark; he was thinking, "Why need she go? Why could she not stay on with the Armitages at Bellosguardo, whilst he was at the frontier, and then there would be less reason for him to keep silence? Surely she could bear as much suspense as Miss Sophy Langenfels? England was a long way off; but if she were to stay with the Armitages—only Dudley would never give his consent to that."

Again and again all through this interview, they lapsed into these awkward silences in

which the hearts of each said only too much. She was sitting quietly by his side, her eyes resting on the ground, her hands lying listlessly in her lap. She had a pair of scissors in one, with which she had been cutting seed-pods, and some sheets of white paper which she had brought out to fold the seeds in. The scissors dropped to the ground, the paper followed. Templemore picked them up, and without taking much thought of what he was doing, began to snip at the paper as his fancy directed.

“This indenture witnesseth,” said Audrey, taking up the half of a sheet which he had divided by zigzag strokes of the scissors until the jagged edge of the paper looked like a long row of w’s, some tall, some short, some running uphill, some falling down, but about as irregular a piece of scissor-work as could be accomplished.

“Yes,” said Templemore, holding up the other piece, “it is like an indenture—just like one; but what does it bear witness to?”

“Our dulness, I am afraid. The fact is, Mr. Templemore, I believe we are both so

sorry to leave Bellosguardo, that we cannot find much to say," said she rather mockingly.

"That is true. I do feel as if I could not talk, but now I have cut this so beautifully it must witness something. You know an indenture betokens a contract; let us make some sort of a contract together, and swear to 'keep it with an equal mind.' What shall it be? Let me see. You shall have one half of it, and I the other; let us each promise to keep our pieces for ever."

Audrey laughed and said, "Yes, we will keep them for ever."

"I will write my name on one piece," said he, "and you must write your name on the other."

"Am I to write my real name?" asked Audrey, "or that you know me by?"

"What is your name?" said he. "I thought it was Audrey." And his voice dwelt with pleasure on its two soft syllables, but he was by no means satisfied with the thought of any change in anything which belonged to her.

"Etheldreda is my name. Papa called me Audrey. It is the short name for it."

“Oh, write Audrey,” said he; “I like it so very much better. No, by-the-by,” he added, “we ought to sign this in a formal and business-like manner, so please write Etheldreda.” And so saying, he gave her a pencil, and watched as the hand which had written so many stupid letters for him now wrote this name at his bidding; and as she wrote, a further development of the idea rushed into his mind—partly suggested by his use of the word “business-like”—and he thought he saw a way of keeping a slight hold upon her in the future, or at any rate of providing a slight safeguard against losing her altogether, and said, “These papers are to be returned under certain conditions. If I die while I am away, my friends will send this to you; I shall put it in an envelope, addressed to Miss Wentworth, of Minsteracres, and if you get it, you will know that the poor fellow whose name is written on it has bid good-bye to this life; but as long as I keep it, I am alive.”

Audrey did not like to hear him speak thus of dying, but the better to hide that it gave her pain, she followed suit, and said—

“Then I’ll do the same. I’ll tell some one to send you my half if I get very ill and die. But how gloomy our arrangements seem !”

“No, you will send me your half if you are going to be married. Send it a long time beforehand, so that I may rush back to England to see the last of you. Remember, I am a long way off, and give me timely notice, so that I may be able to come.”

Audrey had blushed a little when he thus spoke of her marrying; now, to put a good face on it, she said—

“But you speak of marrying and dying as equally gloomy and conclusive !”

“Your marrying would be as bad a thing for me as my own dying,” said he; and when he found what he had said, he jumped up and began to pick up some of the papers he had flung about while cutting at random: anything to hide his face, and get time to master the inclination he felt to speak further. After a while he said, in a would-be indifferent voice—

“I hope your brother won’t let picnic parties come in his park; we don’t allow

it at Breamore. They leave sandwich papers and empty bottles lying all over, and quite destroy the appearance of the park. I hate the lower classes when they amuse themselves; none of us would ever go away leaving unsightly white papers to mark where a feast has been."

He said all this without ever looking round to see how she had taken that speech about her marrying; but there was a great deal of quiet pride about Audrey, and when he did turn, she was sitting looking perfectly composed and dignified, with her piece of the indenture lying on her lap, and her hands folded above it.

"Don't you think," said she, "that the parks at home will seem very melancholy-looking after this blaze of sunshine and flowers?"

"I am no fair judge of this place," was his reply. "I have been happier here than I ever was in my life before; but the parks at home are very beautiful, and I remember very jolly times in some of them."

And just at this moment when Audrey was

by his side, and all going so happily and well, if the thought of little Polly did not rush into his mind! He had sat with her in the park at home just as he was sitting with Audrey now, and as he thought of that, he seemed to see the green trees waving over them, and hear the noisy little river hurrying past them, tossing a few topaz and amber jewels for them to look at as it flowed over its stony bed. These unwelcome thoughts always do thrust themselves to the front when most unwelcome of all.

He would not even allow himself to think of her for a moment. What right had she to intrude upon him now? Giving her up was not his doing—his father had insisted on it; he had only had to obey, and was not responsible. He had suffered already quite as much as he meant to suffer about it, and he turned back to Audrey.

“Then it is a faithful promise, that before you marry you will send me your half of this indenture, and will write either on it, or on another piece of paper, that such is the case, naming the time and the place of the

ceremony, and of course the name of the person?"

How his demands were rising! Audrey was so ridiculously shy at all times, and so vexed at the turn the conversation had now taken, that tears stood in her eyes. It seemed so difficult to answer such a question as this; but just because she was so shy, she sat still and tried to speak as if she could do so with ease, though her natural impulse was to run away.

"Oh no, Mr. Templemore, I could not do all that; I never said I would do all that. I never agreed to do anything but send the paper to you if I were dying."

"Never mind," said he, pushing what he thought his advantage; "you will do this for me. I have a fancy for it. You may think me foolish—I dare say I am—but humour me."

For his idea was, that if he could make her promise to send him this paper some time before she married, he could, if ever it came to that, hurry back to England—beg, pray, and intreat—throw himself on her mercy in any way and every way, until in the end he

succeeded in persuading her to give up any marriage except with himself. And he urged this point now, and trusted to the power carrying it might give him in the future so much, because there was something which told him that she had a very strong feeling in his favour, and would never be able to resist him if he pleaded with all his heart. This being the case, it was maddening not to be able to get her to engage herself to him now; but if that was not to be, this promise was the next best thing.

“Mr. Templemore,” said Audley reluctantly, “it seems such an odd thing to do. I don’t like to give such a promise—I could give it safely enough, no doubt; for I am quite sure nothing of the kind will happen—but really I don’t like.”

“Oh, do!” said he; “I have taken such a fancy into my head for your doing this. I know what the end will be if you refuse; I shall be the one who will have to send the paper back. The Caffres will catch me, and paint me with honey to make me attractive, and give me to the ants to eat; or if they are

bent on mercy, they will burn me. Well, just as you like."

Mr. Templemore's reasoning would not bear daylight. Audrey did not think it did, but the tone of his voice, and the thought that once more he was going to set out on an expedition which had already cost him so dear, touched her; and she said hastily, "If you really wish it I will promise."

"Then," said Templemore, his eyes bright with pleasure, "you promise me solemnly and faithfully that if ever it should happen that you were going to be married, you would take means to get my address from my people—your brother would manage that for you—and send me that paper, giving me time enough to come back to England if so disposed. Excuse my recapitulating all this—I want to see if you quite understand."

"But, Mr. Templemore," said Audrey, shrinking more and more from him and his proposition, "we began this as a jest—just to find something to do with the papers; you are making it so serious!"

"It is serious," he began. "Well, no," he

added, recovering himself, "it is not; but never mind about its looking serious—if we do it at all, we had better do it thoroughly; besides, if as you say nothing of the kind is likely to happen, you won't need to do anything. Come, please promise."

"I promise;" and she sighed, partly with annoyance and partly from nervousness.

"I believe," said Templemore smiling, but loving her for her weakness, "that women always feel nervous the moment a thing assumes a legal sort of a binding aspect. There is nothing in it really. Just think how easy it is for you to put a letter in the post; it is nothing more than that."

"I know," said Audrey, rising and intending now that it was over to get away. "I will keep my promise as I have given it;" and she folded her half of the indenture and prepared to go.

He did not mean to let her leave him yet, but he saw he had made her so uncomfortable that she was very anxious to do so. He, in his turn, folded his paper, and laughed and jested a little over the arrangement they

had made, just to try to restore her to ease ; but he ended by saying—

“ Well, I hope, Miss Wentworth, you won’t ever get my half. I have not much fear of Sandilli ; I think he is beginning to knock under.”

“ I do so dislike the idea of the promise you wish to make to me,” said she ; “ please let us arrange something different. Don’t send me the paper in case of anything very bad happening ; bad news always travels so very quickly of its own accord ; let it be that you will send it if you marry, and then it won’t seem so dismal.”

This was a cheerful speech for Mr. Templemore to hear, after the pains he had taken to point out the light in which he regarded matrimony when undertaken by her.

“ I marry ! ” cried he. “ You don’t suppose there is any chance of my marrying ? Do you think I should have teased you so about this if I had not known that that was out of the question ? No, when I think of marrying, I trust that you will hear of it in a very different way.”

He spoke with some irritation and impetuosity, and he looked at her as he said the last words, and their eyes met. His words were significant, but his eyes spoke yet more plainly. She blushed to the very roots of her hair, as her eyes fell beneath the weight of what they had learnt. She put out her hand as if she were blind and seeking for some support, and held for a moment by the back of the garden seat near which she was standing; while he felt at one moment ashamed to death at having been so untrue to his word as to let her see so plainly, as he feared she must have done, what filled heart and soul—the next he was intoxicated with delight. The burden of concealment was removed from him! She knew his mind, and she was not angry!

Audrey, meantime, had strolled away quietly down one of the walks leading home, glad to hide a rush of sudden tears. He stayed where he was a minute or two, trying to think clearly enough in the tumult of delight and excitement, to know if he had lost all hold of his secret—if he had been quite false to

his word. He felt as if he had offered and been accepted, but he hardly thought words to that effect had passed between them. If they had not done so already, they should not—he would bind her no further; but, thank Heaven! he knew enough now to enable him to bear up through the long time of waiting which lay before him. He followed her. She looked so slight, so young, so delicate, as she moved waveringly before his eyes under the dark trees, that his instincts of protection were aroused, and he ran to offer his arm; and all that day his manner was that of a happy accepted lover, who has a right to watch over his own betrothed: and his voice was low and gentle as he spoke to her, and there was something in his way of speaking which showed he felt they two knew of a bond which held them together unknown to all. No one else did know of it; no one observed anything but that Audrey was often silent, and very affectionate in her demeanour to all. Poor child! she was so happy that she could not help being that—but there was no sign of the two being lovers; the intimate terms they

had all lived on for so many weeks afforded scope for much tender regret at the parting which was now so near, and no one saw more. But all the long afternoon and evening she hardly dared to look at Mr. Templemore—there was something in his eyes which amounted to saying “*My Audrey*”; and when he held her hand a second or so when he bid her good night, and said in a low voice, “You won’t forget,” she felt she never should—that day would live in her memory for ever. Nor could she ever forget the strange, strange effect of touching a hand which held hers in a clasp as tender and gentle as a woman’s, but at the same time as firmly as if he had meant her to understand that he claimed her as his own from this time forth for ever. It had been an intensely happy day, so happy that it carried her blissfully over what would else have been so trying, the pain of separation. She was hopeful; he would soon be back in England, and when she got to Minsteracres she would see his father and mother and little sister, and the place where he had lived when a boy, and would have time to dream about

the happy, happy days the future had in store for them; and all that night she lay thinking over this future—repeating every word he had said, recalling every change in his dear face. Now she knew why he was so anxious to have her opinion of that other engagement. Poor fellow! he was generous and unselfish and noble—but one word from such a man as he was enough to repay her for all past and future suffering on his account, and to bind her to him for ever.

And then, in the morning, there was a bustle and hurry of departure, with wistful searching into eyes which would be seen no more for months; or perhaps some word was said, some trifling word unremarked by those around, which brought to Audrey a sense that she was being cared for by one to whom her safety and comfort was all important, and she could say in her own sweet way that she hoped he would not be too rash when he joined Sir Harry Smith, and that he ought not to go too soon, for he must remember he was still an invalid; and each felt dear to the other, and happy because

it was so, and yet nothing more had been said than has been narrated.

Then the Armitages and Mr. Templemore escorted Dudley and his sister on board the *Dodona*, which was to be their home for the next six weeks. No sooner had poor Audrey got on deck, where the Lord Bishop of Tomatoland was bustling about in the crowd, in a state of pompous activity in pursuit of his unruly younger boys, than one glance at him and his prudent partner, whom he dragged hither and thither on his arm, showed her that the changes and chances of this mortal life had thrown her amongst people whom it would task all her powers of commonplaceness to get on with. Goodness and respectability beamed in every feature, but oh! the vistas of dulness which opened before her.

She huddled herself away in a corner with the friends she was leaving, and her head drooped and her heart sank lower and lower. Dudley was with the two sons of the bishop, who had been on the hunting expedition with him; but Audrey could spare very little time to greet them. And then the parting came.

One lingering good-bye, and it was over; but she followed them with her eyes till the last speck vanished.

“Poor dear little thing!” said Mrs. Armitage to Mr. Templemore, as they drove back to Bellosguardo after depositing her husband at his office; “I do love that child! You are sure you kept your word with me, and did not make her an offer? Mind, I had my doubts about it once or twice this morning.”

“I am sure I did not make her an offer; but I am sure of nothing else. She must have seen I admired her.”

“If you are quite sure you made no offer, that is all I care about. She will have to get used to admiration.”

“I made her no offer in words. I wished to do so, and she must have seen that I did.”

“But you did not in any way commit yourself, or try to ascertain her feelings?”

“No; but if you knew what hard work it was to hold my tongue!”

“That is right!” exclaimed Mrs. Armitage. And she thought it was so. Neither did Brian Templemore see that there was anything particularly wrong about his answer.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Alas ! the fowls of heaven have wings,
And blasts of heaven will aid their flight.
They mount—how short a voyage brings
The wanderers back to their delight !
Chains tie us down by land and sea.”

WORDSWORTH.

THE bishop was very polite and attentive to Audrey, and so was Mrs. Heriot, his wife ; and, knowing she was “ a young woman who had a very pretty property,” they did not object to seeing their two elder sons, Gustavus and Albert, Dudley’s hunting companions, as polite as they themselves were, and smiled benignantly when they found either the one or the other (for both had become very nautical during the voyage) initiating Audrey into the mysteries of boxing the compass, or the intricacies of the various knots tied by the sailors ; though even in the midst of a possibly

nascent love affair—and a love affair of such a desirable character—the bishop could not help interposing a few words, just to make the matter clearer to the dear child, thereby hopelessly obliterating every trace of any idea she had previously received from the son. For the father, poor man, in spite of a large power of language, was not one likely to succeed in making things clearer, and the points of the compass became erratic as he described them, and the sailors' knots turned into "grannies'" knots as he touched them.

The bishop might like to see the young people getting on so well together, but Dudley did not, and many a time when he observed Audrey sitting with one of the young Heriots, engaged in what seemed an interesting conversation, he went and tried to break into it and keep the two apart; but he might safely have left Audrey for hours with either of the two, so far as her heart was concerned. Heart and mind were far away. She heard all that was said to her—she responded; but her answers were often only made in an absent manner; and after a while Mr. Albert Heriot

pronounced her “stupid,” and left her to his brother, who was a year older than himself, and more able to appreciate the advantages of marrying an heiress. Gustavus Heriot had gone with his brother to pay their father a visit in Tomatoland, and see a little of India at the same time, and he was returning home to receive a small family living in the gift of an uncle of his, and settle down as a country clergyman. Dudley well knew his prospects. The living was worth four hundred a year, with house and garden; and then, in the future, there was every chance of his inheriting a very large estate now in the possession of the said uncle. But the uncle was by no means an old man, and many things might occur to stop this: and Dudley did not see what right he had to imagine himself to be at all a suitable husband for his sister; so when, by Albert’s retirement, Gustavus’s attentions became more particular, Dudley’s surveillance became more particular also, and he resolved to do more than watch—he would at once tell his sister this must not be. He saw she did not intend to encourage the

young gentleman, but she must at once show plainly that such a thing was simply out of the question. It was highly derogatory to a girl of Audrey's position to be spoken of as likely to be content with a humble alliance, and to settle tranquilly down in a country village, in a house which could not be kept up without her income. Dudley mentally placed Audrey in the kind of home which he thought her entitled to look for, and it was a very different one from any Mr. Heriot could offer her; though, income apart, he was a good fellow enough.

Without at first speaking directly to Audrey, Dudley said so much that she could not fail to apprehend his meaning, and the result of a little silent thought after he left her was that she saw that all he had said about young Heriot would equally apply to Mr. Templemore. Was it—could it be possible that Dudley would also disapprove of him? Brian Templemore had only an allowance of two hundred a year, no profession, and his prospects of inheritance were as remote as those of Mr. Heriot. It had never

occurred to her before that she had done what Dudley would disapprove of, and the discovery was painful and alarming. Wistfully, she tried to read Dudley's face as if she hoped to see in it some sign that when the time came he would not oppose what she had set her heart on. He was at some distance from her, watching the captain taking an observation; for he was the kind of man who used every opportunity of learning, and now, at sea, he was mastering so far as he could the art of navigation. When that operation was over, he became conscious his sister was watching him, and how earnest her face was, and went to her.

"What is it, dear? I see you are worried about something."

"I am thinking over what you said just now, Dudley. Don't think I care about Mr. Heriot, for I don't a bit, and never knew he thought about me till you said so; but really, dear Dudley, supposing I had cared for him, I don't see why you need have looked upon it as such a bad thing."

"Don't you?" said he rather roughly, "then I do—it would be a wretched match

for you. A man with an income of only four hundred a year has no right to think of you, unless he wants your money to help him to live—but that is a thing to resist.”

“Oh no, Dudley; if only I had liked him and he had—well, asked me to marry him, how very delightful it would have been to help to make a happy home for him! That is the good of money.”

“Audrey,” said Dudley, who did not at all like the way she was speaking, “promise me—promise me you won’t marry him.”

“I will swear it if you like,” replied Audrey, “for I am so certain I never will; but I can’t see your reason for objecting—it can’t be the money, for he will have his uncle’s estate some day.”

“Once for all, Audrey, please to understand that you are not to marry anybody who is to have an estate some day. The man you accept must have what he is going to have now. The world is full of people who expect to have estates left to them, but they don’t always get what they count upon, and meantime they want to live.”

“But,” said Audrey, pushing her inquiries to the very verge of prudence, for the sake of getting to know her brother’s mind, “if young Mr. Heriot expected this estate from his father, and had an allowance now, would not that be enough? You would not disapprove in that case, would you? I am only using Mr. Heriot’s name as an example—of course I am speaking generally.”

“Well, if he had a handsome allowance of twelve or fifteen hundred a year now, and was absolutely sure to have the estate hereafter, I should not think it so bad; but nothing less than that would do: it is not the thing when all the money is on the woman’s side. Remember, Audrey, there are numbers of men who look out for rich wives, and only marry for the sake of the money they secure by doing it.”

“Well,” said Audrey, “make yourself happy, Dudley. You know we have both made up our minds not to marry for ages, so we need not trouble ourselves about these things now.”

“And you have promised to refuse Gustavus Heriot?”

“I have, if he asks me.”

“And Albert too?” said Dudley, thinking her ready acquiescence might betoken some flaw in the promise, and that perhaps she secretly preferred the brother.

“Yes—and the bishop too!” said she, laughing; but she was in anything but a laughing humour, for she saw plainly that an allowance of two hundred a year, which might in case of need be raised, perhaps, to four or five, would not tempt Dudley into sanctioning her engagement to the man to whom she hoped one day to contract herself openly, and to whom she now steadily believed herself engaged privately.

“What is the matter, my dear young lady?” said the bishop, coming to her after Dudley had retired; even the bishop saw she was uneasy about something.

“Nothing; I am only thinking.”

“And to what knotty point may my young friend’s attention be given?”

“I was thinking what a nuisance money was!” said Audrey, “and how much happier people are who only have a little!”

“Wealth,” observed the bishop—and so far as he himself was concerned he spoke the truth—“possesses no attractions for me save as a means of doing good. My object in returning to England now is to raise a sum of money to carry on my work in Tomatoland; but I hope, before I go back there, I shall see my dear boy Gustavus happily settled in his own little peaceful rectory. That is a good young man, Miss Wentworth—a reliable, safe young man!”

Audrey did not doubt it; in those days she thought all young men “reliable and safe.”

“I should like to show you his future home, Miss Wentworth—the most charmingly rural abode; and he will have such an attractive parish to preside over,” etc., etc., and so on in praise of Gustavus and his prospects, until Audrey wished she could make over five hundred a year to “Gus,” which would be as good to the bishop as getting her for a daughter-in-law, and tend to diminish her own income, which seemed as if it were going to be a trouble to her and stand in the way of her happiness.

Dudley was answerable for much of the persecution which fell to her lot, for as he got nearer home he thought more and more of Minsteracres, assumed more and more of the manner of a landed proprietor; and as any attempts he made to discuss agricultural questions with Sir David Nithisdale, who had land of his own some twelve or fifteen miles on the other side of Dorminster, soon came to an end from his own lack of knowledge, he was driven to dwell on the beauties of nature as manifested in the park at Minsteracres to the bishop and Mrs. Heriot, who were never tired of listening to him, partly because they themselves felt a reflected interest in the subject, and partly because when Dudley was with them it left Gus such splendid opportunities of pushing his fortunes. Audrey sometimes looked up in surprise as she heard Dudley dwelling so enthusiastically on the beauty of the park, the tumultuous rush of the little river, the venerable dignity of the old hall, because, to say the truth, she remembered so well that he had always declared going to Minsteracres was the greatest bore he knew—

that the hall was a wretched old barrack of a place, and that there was nothing to amuse yourself with from morning till night. He looked on all now from such a different point of view. He was growing very much more handsome, Audrey thought; and it was true. Either the long voyage or the happy change in his fortunes had given an impetus to his power of life, for he was certainly becoming much stronger, and more and more good-looking. She was observing this one day with great delight, when a lady by her side, who had come on board at Madeira, and whom she had not seen since, turned to her and said very earnestly—

“Excuse me, young lady, but do tell me the name of that gentleman standing by the companion ladder if you know it.”

“Yes, I know it; it is Dudley Wentworth”—“my brother” she was going to add; but the stranger exclaimed—

“Ah! I was sure of it. I felt you would say his name was Wentworth.”

Hearing the eager accents in which she spoke, and surprised by her manner, Audrey

looked more attentively at her neighbour on the seat, and found she was a lady who might be of any age from thirty to forty. Her figure was young and active, her movements abrupt and decided; her face rather massive and square, with a strong development in the lower part of it, her mouth and chin showing unmistakably that she had what is termed "a will of her own." At this moment the expression of her hazel eyes was thoughtful and tender, but there were flashes of light and colour in them which showed they could light up in anger sudden, deep, and lasting. Her hair was slightly streaked with grey—it was coarse, and evidently averse to being combed straight or lying flat; her complexion dark and tinged with dusky red. She was not good-looking, but there was something attractive in her face from its appearance of resolute probity and steadfast truth. She was shabbily dressed in an old black dress and bonnet and grey tweed waterproof, but she had a pretty hand and foot, and shabby as she was, was certainly a lady. All this Audrey saw at a glance, for she lost no time in making her observations, but said simply—

“My name is Wentworth too; he is my brother.”

“You a Wentworth!” said the lady, turning with a sudden jerk. “Why, so you are! I might have known that if I had had a good look at you when I sat down, but as this is the first time I have been on deck since I came on board, I felt my best plan was to find a seat as quickly as I could. Yes, you are a Wentworth; and now if I ask who your father was, I think you will say Captain Wentworth.”

“Colonel Wentworth was my father—Walter Wentworth.”

“Ah! yes, I know, and I know he is dead.” She looked so much more affected than strangers usually are by such facts, that Audrey was silent for fear of saying something wrong. “I knew him when I was about your age, young lady, but that is now a long time since. I was seventeen, and he was eight and twenty, and that is just twenty-three years ago. When I saw your brother, it was just as if all that time was wiped away.”

She was getting very silent, and Audrey, who was too young to understand that the

faded lady in the shabby black dress might have had her day for being young, beautiful, and romantic, said by way of saying something—

“You liked him, did you not? I believe most people liked him.”

“Oh yes, I liked him,” she replied with a very marked emphasis and some suspicion of bitterness. Then Dudley seemed to be coming near—“Don’t introduce me to him,” said she, forgetting that Audrey did not know her name, “at least not till I say you may;”—but seeing Audrey was talking to some one, he moved on.

After a time some of the Heriots, Gus among the number, tried to get her away, for it seemed impossible to derive any pleasure from her society when that severe little lady was sitting so near her. They did persuade her to go to the side of the vessel for a minute, just to look at a group of tumbling porpoises, and then Gus said—

“Do come away from that forbidding-looking lady, do! she is enough to freeze the source of language. Did you ever see such a dingy-looking dragon of a woman?”

But Audrey hurried back to the stranger's side, after casting a look of reproach on Gustavus, who did not seem to take into account what sharp ears people have sometimes. Audrey was blushing and confused when she sat down again—she was so afraid the stranger had heard; and she must have heard, for she put her white hand on Audrey's and said—

“Don't look uncomfortable, child, it was neither you nor your brother who spoke, and those people's criticisms don't affect me. Your father was a gentleman, too, in those things;” and with this rather unconnected remark she relapsed into silence.

After a while it grew cold and she prepared to go below, but first she turned to Audrey, and her eyes were very full of kindness as she looked at her and said—

“Good-bye, Miss Wentworth; I shall see you again, I hope.” And then she went; but she came no more on deck, and very soon Audrey forgot to wonder about her.

Although Gustavus Heriot redoubled his attentions to Audrey as they neared England, Dudley ceased to be anxious about it. He

trusted to his sister's promise, and he saw how cold she was to her admirer now that her eyes had been opened to his intentions. The bishop saw it too, and as he really was "desirous to see the boy well set a-going in life," he urged him to get the matter settled one way or another before they left the ship. The two young Heriot boys, Dick and Fred, could not help hearing, or rather made it their business to hear, all that was going on, and were keenly aware that "Gus was spoony," and were constantly on the watch for the offer which they were perfectly conscious that their father and mother wanted him to make. They quite approved of Audrey, nay, thought her an "awfully jolly girl," but they could not understand how Gus could be so stupid—so unlike himself as he had become since this fancy had taken possession of him. If only he would propose to her and be done!

Many a time they nipped this offer in the bud by coming and asking some question at a critical moment, or hanging about listening. But one day Gus thought he had a chance of an uninterrupted half-hour or so, and as they

expected to arrive at Southampton next day, he resolved he would use it. Audrey had had a headache, and Dudley had made a place for her on deck with rugs and cushions and water-proofs, where she could rest comfortably, and she had been lying there a great part of the morning, looking into the sky and wondering where Mr. Templemore was, and what he was doing.

At eight bells, as the nautical Mr. Gus himself would have expressed it, she had felt better, and gone down for a book, more for the sake of seeming as if she were doing something than because she wanted it; and when she came back, and had taken her place among her cushions once more, Gus came too. He tried to awaken some show of sympathy by observing that by this time to-morrow they would, if all went well, be in sight of Southampton, and their pleasant voyage over. But Audrey was pleased to think of getting to England. Then he sadly observed that she would go away to Minsteracres, and never think any more of any of her fellow-passengers in the *Dodona*.

Audrey entered a feeble protest. Then he asked her if she and Dudley were likely to spend any part of the year at Malvern? The "governor," and his mother, and all of them were going this summer, because his living was so near; he would so like to show Miss Wentworth his living—he wondered if she would think the house pretty.

She was sure she would; from all she had heard it must be beautiful.

Then Mr. Gus heaved a deep sigh, looked to the right and to the left for his juvenile tormentors, and after seeing that Fred was lying watching them at a distance—watching them with all his eyes—but quite out of hearing, and Dick nowhere to be seen, he said—

"Oh, Miss Wentworth, I'm in an awful state about your going away to-morrow! I shall never be happy when you are not where I am!"

As he said this with heartfelt fervour, he received a sudden dig in the back, as he afterwards expressed it, from an unseen hand behind some cushions and rugs, and a voice—a familiar voice—exclaimed in a whisper of sadly miscalculated strength—

“That’s the style, Gus! Go on—that’s the way to get her!”

Audrey, naughty little thing that she was, was shaking with suppressed laughter.

Gus flew at the rugs and cushions, to dislodge the *enfant terrible*.

“Come out, you young rascal!” cried he. “I’ll teach you to hide yourself, to listen this way!” and so saying, dragged out little Dick, his brother, whose liking for good work in offers had got the better of him so inopportunately.

But Gus had lost his chance for that day, for Dick said Gus had pulled his hair in getting him out, and stood by them sulkily, divided between anger and desire to howl; and Audrey got up and went to Dudley, and putting her arm within his, watched with him the motion of the vessel as she sped through the waters, bearing them to the home they had so long looked forward to. And Gus related to his parents the misadventure which had befallen him. But he could get no more opportunities of speaking with Audrey alone; while Dick crouched in a corner, shrinking from the in-

dignant looks of his father and mother, and the injured glances of his brother.

“You naughty boy! you never seem to think what mischief you may do by your stupidity!” said Mrs. Heriot.

But Dick thought Gus was the one who had been stupid, “to make such a long story of nothing.”

Before touching land, the bishop made an arrangement with Dudley to go down to Dorminster, to preach in behalf of his Tomatoland missions; and Dudley munificently put his name down for a handsome sum on his list, while Audrey modestly promised for the same purpose some of the thousand a year they admired so much. But Mrs. Heriot wanted more than a subscription from her, and did not like to lose sight of her thus. They were all going to London — what hotel did the Wentworths patronise? The Wentworths were going to the Cleveland.

“Ah!” said Mrs. Heriot with a long-drawn-out sigh, “the bishop always goes to a clerical boarding-house in — Street, near the British

Museum. You see we are a large family, my love ! ”

And she looked affectionately into Audrey's face as she spoke ; and then she inquired if Audrey would not let her take her for a day's shopping when they were in London. Audrey must have shopping to do, she was sure—and she was equally sure that Dudley would not like to be obliged to accompany her.

It was fixed that Mrs. Heriot should call at the Cleveland for her the day after their arrival in town ; on which that lady mentally resolved that she would then get her quite away from Dudley, so as to give Gus the opportunity he so much wanted. From Southampton Dudley telegraphed to his man of business at Dorchester that he had arrived in England and would, if the house could be made ready for him, proceed to Minsteracres after spending two days in London. And as the train which bore them thither hurried past snug little homesteads, nestling each under its own clump of sycamore trees, and capacious brick mansions embowered in green parks, his heart

swelled with pleasure at the thought that he too owned a large piece of this beautiful country, where all was so fresh and luxuriant, orderly, and well-to-do-looking.

CHAPTER IX.

Cleo. Though it be honest, it is never good
To bring bad news: Give to a gracious message
An host of tongues; but let ill tidings
Tell themselves."

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA.

Iago. He is much changed.
Lod. Are his wits safe? is he not light of brain?"

OTHELLO.

THE morning after their arrival in London they breakfasted early and sat reading their newspapers. After their long absence from England, the rapidity with which each item of intelligence found its way into print seemed little less than marvellous to them. Half an hour passed in wondering at this and debating how they should spend the day so as to get the most amusement out of it. Dudley wished to go down to Minsteracres next day. He was now expecting a reply to the telegram he had

sent from Southampton to ask if all would be ready for them, and when that had come he was going out to choose some things he wanted, while Audrey was with Mrs. Heriot.

“And then,” said Dudley, “what shall we do? Go and see something or somebody, or do what?”

“Do you know, dear Dudley, you and I are rather desolate people. We have no one in particular to go to see—nobody who cares whether we come home or stay away.”

“Only wait, Audrey. In a year’s time, my child, you will see that all that will be very different. And after all, how jolly it is now being here as we are, with nothing to do but make up our minds which pleasure we will enjoy. When I was last here, I was a poor devil who had to pick and choose what I would have, according to the state of my purse, which was always miserably thin. I went in omnibuses then, or even walked, as the cheapest way of getting over the ground; that is not a nice state of things at all, Miss Audrey, I can assure you. London is all very well for people who are well off, but

hateful for those who have at every moment to think of what they can afford."

"Poor things!" said Audrey, "I wish we could make life pleasanter to some of them."

At this moment a servant brought a card—Mr. Davison, Dorminster. Mr. Davison, he said, was below, and would like to have a few words with Mr. Wentworth in private.

"Let him come here," said Dudley. "Audrey, it is the lawyer from Dorminster; he has come instead of writing—I mean sending a telegram. How very civil of him!" And there was a strong flavour of satisfaction in Dudley's voice, which showed plainly how much he enjoyed being served with deference.

Audrey left him.

Mr. Davison entered with a low bow, and swept the room with a glance comprehensive enough to take in all it contained; then he read the face of the man he had come to speak to. "Prompt, capable, and enduring—yes, enduring," said he to himself.

"You are very kind to come in person; when I sent that telegram to you from Southampton, Mr. Davison, my only idea was that

you would perhaps be so good as to let me know how soon the house at Ministeracres could be got ready to receive my sister and myself—in a plain way, of course. We are just off a journey, and only care for a quiet, comfortable shelter.”

The lawyer did not reply for a moment, but kept a pair of very searching eyes steadily fixed on Dudley’s face.

“I thought it better to come at once, Mr. Wentworth,” said he at last; “I have a communication to make to you of some importance, and the less delay the better.”

Dudley always caught something of the manner of the person who was speaking to him when it was desirable that he should do so. In this case he bowed with some solemnity.

“The fact is, my dear sir, your late father’s cousin—my late respected client, Mr. Philip Wentworth—on some occasions differed in opinion from his professional advisers, and took his own way when he did so in spite of everything.”

Dudley began to think Mr. Philip Went-

worth must have so far departed from customary usage that he had come to life again, and was now settled at Minsteracres, but pending information to that effect from the family lawyer now before him, he only bowed once more and waited.

“I regret to say I have some very unpleasant tidings to communicate.”

“I hope there is nothing amiss at Minsteracres,” said Dudley anxiously.

“There is indeed, my dear young sir; I grieve to say it, but there is something most seriously amiss. I dare say you have heard of Thistlewood’s Bank, an old-established bank in our county, well known by every one. Well, some few years ago there was some change in the management of it, and Mr. Philip Wentworth, who was determined to look on it favourably, and thought it promised to be a very lucrative concern, would invest some money in it. All I can say is that it was contrary to our advice—it was indeed!” and Mr. Davison heaved a deep sigh, and wiped his forehead.

“The money is all gone, I suppose—and it

was a very large sum?" said Dudley, inwardly excited, but to all appearance very calm. "How much has gone, and what is left for me?"

"All is gone—everything is gone!" exclaimed the lawyer, who would have been calm himself if Dudley had shown any want of self-control, but who was stirred up into excitement by his unnatural composure. "All is gone!" and he could say no more.

"How can all be gone," said Dudley incredulously; "people only invest their spare money."

"The liability was not limited."

"Not limited!" echoed Dudley, beginning to grasp the extent of the misfortune.

"Not limited," repeated Mr. Davison sadly. "Mr. Wentworth's confidence in that undertaking amounted to culpability. He would take no warning, hear no reason; he came to ask our advice with his mind made up to take the shares. That is constantly the way with self-directed speculators; they always think they have discovered a perfectly safe mine of wealth—and see the end of it!"

“But does this unlimited liability of theirs mean that I am ruined?” inquired Dudley.

“There is over a million to pay and the shareholders are mostly as poor as church mice!”

“And——?”

“And, my dear young sir, it is a shameful thing, I know; but all my late client, Mr. Philip Wentworth, has left behind him will be but a drop in the ocean compared with the claims of the depositors.”

“You are sure you are not jesting—I mean that there is no mistake about it?” said Dudley. “It seems so impossible to believe it.”

“Sit down,” said Mr. Davison, giving him a chair, for he saw how deadly white he had become. “Sit down. Let me get you something. It is a terrible thing for you, but perhaps—at least I hope—it is not quite so bad as if you had suddenly been deprived of this property after many years of possession.”

Dudley ground his teeth together; he was so enraged at the lawyer for picking out such a sterile ground of consolation as that. “Do you mean to tell me that all my cousin left

me is gone?" he asked, ready to doubt his own senses rather than believe this could be true.

Mr. Davison shook his head and said, "Indeed I do."

"And when did this precious bank break?" was his next question, put in a voice very different in tone to what it had been so short a time before; "it was all right when you sent me that money to the Cape."

"About two months ago. I wrote again to the Cape on the chance of your having been detained longer there. My letter must be there now. I feel for you, my dear sir, most deeply; and, allow me to say how I admire your fortitude."

"And is there no way to resist this? Can nothing be done? I suppose there is no doubt but that it is a fraud," said Dudley, with an expiring effort to struggle against fate.

"None. I have seen all the papers. It is a rascally affair, but nothing can be done. You may depend on my being ready to serve you, Mr. Wentworth, in any way I can, but I have looked into that already."

“And my sister’s fortune? Is that gone too?” asked Dudley.

Mr. Davison bent his head downwards and said, “Naturally, that goes with the rest.”

Dudley had, during this trying interview, been more than once on the point of breaking down. A crisis of this kind was at hand now. He did not choose to show his feelings before this stranger, and said—

“I must go and speak to my sister for one moment. She ought to know this; she was going out shopping this morning, poor child—that is not an amusement for beggars.”

“Let me speak to Miss Wentworth for you,” said Mr. Davison, who did not like what he thought Dudley’s cold-blooded way of taking this misfortune.

“Oh no, I will speak to my sister myself; but I will hear all you have to say to me first, and what you think I had better do.”

“I have nothing more to say,” replied Mr. Davison, “about this most lamentable mischance; my advice to you is to go to Minsteracres with your sister, and live quietly there while the place is still your own. You

can have no establishment of course. Pay the calls so far as you are able, and in the mean time you can make your own arrangements for the future."

Mr. Davison knew that Dudley could not have much fortune, independent of that inherited from his cousin, but had no idea how trifling an income he really had.

"And you think these calls will swallow up all there is?"

"Indeed I do. Of course, if Minsteracres sells well, or if things go better than is expected, there might be a small residue. But in your place I would not count upon it."

Dudley quite started. "I was forgetting it would be sold; then all it contains will have to go too?"

"All but family relics. There are many things which will be valuable to you, sir, which have no very tangible money value; but all this is a matter for future discussion. Believe me, you will find me willing to do all I can to advise and help you. I most sincerely regret that I have been the means of giving you this pain now."

Dudley was glad when he went, he wanted to be alone. When the door closed on Mr. Davison, he threw himself down in a corner of the room on a sofa, and for some minutes indulged in the grief and the rage of disappointment he had been repressing all this time. It had come so suddenly, just when he was going to be so happy. It was such a cruel blow, and he had done nothing to deserve it! This was his first angry thought.

Life had stopped short for him—the future was one long blank. He had lost all in a moment! In all England there could be no one in such helpless, hopeless plight as he; for except poor Audrey he had no one—no relation, no friend, no money, no home, no hope!

Audrey came in; she had knocked at the door, and he had not been aware of it, but hearing no voices she knew he was alone. Never in her life had she seen Dudley in trouble. She was terrified when she saw him now, and crept up silently to him and took his hand.

“Oh, Dudley, what is it? Tell, me darling,” said she; “are you ill?”

“I hope not,” replied he bitterly; “it will be a bad thing for me if I am!” He spoke again almost directly, for he saw her apprehensive eyes. “Something very bad has happened to both of us. We have lost Minsteracres!”

Audrey's eyes became rounder and rounder. She did not understand how such a thing as that could have happened. And then he explained to her all that the reader knows already, adding touches of bitterness inspired by his keen appreciation of their loss. They were beggars; they had nowhere to go to; they would have to work for their living; all their castles in the air were in ruins; there was no more chance of happiness for them; their future was barren of hope.

He would have spared her all this crowding of images of loss, if she had only looked more sad. There was a floating tear in each eye, and her poor little face was very pale and anxious, but she broke out into no grief for the loss of rank and fortune—only fixed those

swimming eyes on her brother, eagerly gazing in his face, and wondering whether this shock was going to make him very ill. The news had stunned her—that is, the effect of the news on Dudley, for she had never seen him affected by grief before; and now she could think of nothing beyond.

“We have got each other yet,” said she pathetically, as he did not speak. “So long as we have that, Dudley, we can make ourselves happy somehow.”

“I see no way of doing it,” said he sternly.

“Where are you going, Dudley?” said she in great alarm; for he rose, looking pale and wild, and his eyes had an unnatural way staring around.

“Out somewhere—let me go. I must go, Audrey; I shall be better out.” And those last words made her drop her hold of the arm by which she was trying to restrain him.

“When will you come back?”

“Don’t worry me, Audrey. Let me go; I shall go mad if I stay here.”

Big tears now fell from her eyes. She

thought he looked as if he were mad already. He had hardly left the room before she reproached herself for having let him go. Was it safe to do so? If he did anything desperate—if he never came back? And as she thought thus, her anxiety became so intense that she ran out of the room, down the long stony flights of stairs, and into all the activity and confusion of the entrance-hall, where comers and goers, and porters and errand boys and portmanteaus, were crossing and re-crossing and running against each other, amid a bewildering din of bells and voices. His name trembled on her lips, but she dared not call; she stood a moment, and then she saw him in the distance striding out towards the door, with a hard-set, changed face. She ran to him, but the heavy door swung to, and she saw him disappear.

“Will no one run after that gentleman for me?” said she to one of the servants, for she had no bonnet on, and even then she remembered that. Such hold have the decencies and observances of life on us, even at its supremest moments.

There was no stopping Dudley. He was gone before the servant could understand whom she meant, and tears stood in her eyes as she turned to go back to her room. When alone, she did have a hearty fit of crying; but she presently consoled herself by remembering Dudley was far too fond of her to go and drown himself, or do anything bad of that kind. He knew quite well she could not live without him. She was a stupid little thing to cry.

Mrs. Heriot came; she had hired a trim brougham for the occasion, and Gus was to meet them at the Exhibition after they had done a certain amount of shopping. She did not tell Audrey that; or that, as she had confided to him the names of the shops they meant to visit—magical, soul-stirring names—there was more than a chance he might meet them sooner.

Audrey in tears—that is, with traces of having been so! Such a sight was almost an incredible one to Mrs. Heriot, who had always seen her as gay as a linnet. All Dudley's money gone! What about Audrey's?

Audrey supposed that was gone too. She had not asked, and she did not look as if she cared now. Mrs. Heriot did care, and did ask, after sympathizing of course. From what she heard, she quickly read the downfall of Audrey's heiress-ship; and, even in the midst of her genuine pity for her, she had time to think of her own child, and what a blessing it was he had never said anything definite, and had escaped being mixed up in this bad business.

"Well, my dear child," said she, in a voice doleful with regret for the loss of this most promising daughter-in-law, "you had better come out all the same; sitting moping there won't mend matters. Come out with me, the air will do you good;" and before Audrey could answer, she passed in review before her mind all the shops to which she could go without fear of encountering Gus, for Gus must henceforth be kept at a prudent distance from this young girl by her side, who, heiress or no heiress, still looked so sweet and pretty.

But Audrey would have no drive, no air, no

shopping: she would stay where she was till Dudley came. And she did stay, occasionally opening the door and peeping out. And then—for she was rather a superstitious little soul—a thought came to her which made her feel chill. Had she brought this on Dudley? Was she the cause of his suffering? Were they both “reaping the misery of a granted prayer”? For all the way home, ever since she had got to know that because she had a thousand a year of her own her brother was almost certain to oppose her marrying the man she loved, on the ground that he had not a correspondingly large income, she had found herself constantly wishing that she was without this tiresome money, which seemed likely to cause evil rather than good to her, and that she was just a poor humble little thing, whom any one might marry without fastidious objections being raised. So far as she herself was concerned, this loss seemed to lift a load of care from her, and smooth her path to happiness. Only, if she had ruined Dudley by her ceaseless utterance of wishes and prayers to be freed from this weight of

riches ! And some words of Mrs. Browning's came to her mind :—

“ God answers sharp and sudden on some prayers,
And thrusts the thing we have prayed for in our face,
A gauntlet with a gift in it.”

Oh, the torment of these hours ! and how many of them seemed to pass and Dudley did not come ! She grew more and more alarmed. Do what she would, she could not help picturing grassy river slopes and a sad man wandering by them, and—but that thought was so unbearably painful, she chased it away. He had left his purse—she found it on the table, and she knew he never carried money loose in his pockets—where could he be, and what could he be doing away so long, and without one farthing of money ? Her own face scared her ; her own thoughts drove her to the very verge of distraction. She ventured downstairs again, into the entrance hall, the place where she saw him last, long ago, in the morning. She hoped to see him open that great outer door and come back. She ventured to the clerk in the office, whose eyes were on all comers and goers ; but when

she moved her lips to say her brother's name, and ask if the clerk had seen him, her voice was hoarse and thick, and quite beyond her power of management, and she burst into tears.

A bystander had heard her doubtful articulation of the first syllable of his name, and guessed the whole story. He took her hand and drew it within his arm, and led her away, saying—

“I think you are Miss Wentworth, and I am a friend of the family—the lawyer, in fact—and I am afraid my bad news has brought this trouble on you. Let me take you to your room, and then I will go anywhere you like in search of your brother. But, my dear young lady, you have no reason to be alarmed. He is a plucky young fellow! He does not want to break down in sight of any one he knows, that is all.”

These sentences were jerked out one by one as they mounted the stairs. Audrey could not speak, but she was conscious of his kindness. He made her drink a glass of sherry, but he could not induce her to have any food;

and he ran in and out all the day, trying to comfort her and assure her of her brother's safety. It was nearly nine o'clock before Dudley, footsore and weary, and dusty, hungry, and hopeless, came in and relieved his sister of the dread that in a moment of despair he had ended his life.

CHAPTER X.

Speed. But tell me true, will't be a match ?

Launce. Ask my dog : if he say ay, it will ; if he say no, it will ; if he shake his tail, and say nothing, it will.

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

AUDREY and her brother had now been ten days at Minsteracres, and how lovely the place was ! She had expected to find the park damp and chill and uninteresting—it was more beautiful in its quiet loveliness than anything she could have dreamed of. The leaves were all opening, the ground strewn with downy pink-striped caps and mantles which had wrapped the tender buds from wintry cold ; and now the sycamore flaunted its broad leaf in full liberty, the limes waved myriads of green shields in your eyes, the chestnut raised its tent-like pyramids, and the poplars and ash-trees leisurely unfolded their

gummy spikes of olive red ; and all were so bright, so fresh, so full of captured sunbeams, that the mere sight of them made it a happiness to be alive. Then there were walks by the river—a brisk little trout stream, and primroses and forget-me-nots grew by its side, whilst above on the banks, and here and there under the beech trees—for they are curiously local in their growth—the wild hyacinths hung their heads in such profusion and splendour that Audrey, for very shame's sake, dared not regret the flowers she had learnt to love in the far south, or think they were more beautiful.

The Hall was one of the finest of the fine old mansions built in the reign of James I. It had belonged to a member of one of the great Yorkshire families, but a descendant of his had lost it and all else in the time of the Commonwealth, when an ancestor of Mr. Philip Wentworth's had got possession of it. The Wentworths had held it ever since. It was a house any family might be proud to own—large, handsome, and thoroughly picturesque ; thoroughly comfortable too, for there were hardly any stairs to climb, and it was

only one story high. It had a long line of frontage, and was rich in bay windows, and delightfully pleasant and restful to look upon ; for it was built of a warm grey stone, all encrusted with golden lichen, which had spread itself out over the surface in shapes which reminded the beholder of maps of unknown countries. A fine old doorway led out on to a terrace, and beyond that was the lawn, bright, green, and smooth, but which presently lost itself unawares in the park. There was a noble hall on the ground-floor of the house, out of which the principal apartments opened. This hall, with its polished oak floor, gigantic fireplace, and carved mantel-piece, was one of the great features of the house ; but the crowning glory was the long gallery. It ran round three sides of the building, and from its windows you saw down into the park, each window having a beauty of its own to disclose. It had a carved roof, all roses and trellis-work, with the arms of the dead and gone builder clenching every knot.

This gallery was full of curiosities and

pictures. Formerly Dudley and Audrey had dwelt on the pleasure of rifling the cupboards and cabinets in it, and finding treasure after treasure, so that the whole of their inheritance should unfold itself slowly, and each separate discovery be a joy to linger and dwell on. Now it was no matter what they found, they never felt that anything was theirs ; and yet, though Dudley was too eager to be just to think of keeping back for himself the most trifling article which had any money value, he would rather have seen a good fire break out in the old hall and sweep all these things into an honourable grave than have them appraised by an auctioneer, haggled over by purchasers, and finally scattered far and wide. All family pictures he would of course keep, though where to put them he had not the least idea.

Meantime, the first call had been made and paid up, and now he and Audrey were looking through papers, etc., and living in one room in the Hall, served by the old housekeeper, Mrs. Pemberton, and her pretty niece Polly, who would have been there even if the Wentworths

had not. Dudley's ideas of honesty were rigidly scrupulous; he and Audrey had the bare necessities of life, and that was all. Even if the company were a fraudulent one, its creditors should honourably receive from him the last shilling they could claim; and when all was paid, he would turn out and begin the world again as best he could. But oh! the grief it was to him to give up the mastership of Minsteracres—to see such beauty on all sides, and to know the place was no longer his! Down to the very garden, he loved and grudged the loss of every inch of it. It was one of the old-fashioned gardens, with turf walks and clipped yew-trees, laid out in the taste of a bygone age; but it was in keeping with the house, and he liked it.

“We might as well plant our flower seeds,” Audrey had said one morning, as she came downstairs with a large packet in her hand, which had been in one of her boxes ever since she left Bellosguardo. “It is nice to do something to make the garden prettier, even though it be for some one else.”

Dudley shrugged his shoulders. “Such feel-

ings are too high for me," said he; "I cannot attain unto them."

"You won't plant them?"

"No; why should I? Everything here is a thousand times too beautiful for the person who gets it as it is;" and he turned away.

"Oh, Dudley!" said Audrey, "perhaps he, whoever he is, may be nicer than we are;" for many thoughts came to Audrey, and sometimes she even imagined that, perhaps, she and her brother had been punished by the loss of Minsteracres for all their selfish, jesting talk of the life of enjoyment they meant to lead when they got it. Every good thing they had ever dwelt on in any of their former conversations was always to be for their own use: in all their talk there had been no mention of their ever trying to do anything to help those less favoured by fortune than themselves. She hinted at this fancy of hers to Dudley, but he only said—

"Bah! what would have been the use of planning, when we were at the Cape, what we would give to hospitals or almshouses here? You may be quite sure that all that would

have been taken out of our hands, and that if we had come back here rich, as we ought to have done, we should have had the parson of the parish one day with a doleful face and story, and the clerk the next, and each would have dipped his fingers into our pockets. There is never any need to plan to give your money away, for if you have any, people won't let you keep it."

"But it is not quite the same thing, is it, Dudley dear, if we give it in that way as if——"

"Don't you be 'pernicketty,' Audrey. If I had anything to give, you may be sure I should not be wanting in any case of true need."

"Quite—I know you would not," said she, putting her hand on his shoulder and resting her forehead on it, but very soon letting her eyes wander away to an opening in the trees, where she saw a little, thin, spiral column of curling blue smoke.

It came from a chimney at Breamore, and even if from the kitchen chimney, it was glorious beyond all smoke from chimneys of

other houses. Upstairs in her own room she could see more: a level slope of grey slate roof, a window sparkling in the sun. Though no one had told her it was Breamore, she had instinctively known that it was so the very first evening she had arrived at Minsteracres, and now morning, noon, and night she sought this fragment of roof as the face of a faithful friend.

Dearly she longed to see a little more of the house, but, though so near that some of the trees on the outskirts of the Templemores' garden hung over into the park at Minsteracres, she could not catch a glimpse of it from any other point; either a clump of trees or some bit of rising ground came in between her and the desire of her eyes at every turn. She made many experimental visits to various hills in their own grounds, but all in vain, and she was so conscious of her wish that she became ashamed and afraid of Dudley's discovering it. At last, on the tenth day of her stay at Minsteracres, she ventured beyond the gates and down a shady country road, and five minutes' sharp walk brought her to a part of

the road where all the trees in the park at Breamore had been cut down, so as to give an uninterrupted view of the house. It was, as Mr. Fergusson would say, "one of those porticoed houses of the last century which are so thoroughly English and aristocratic, that one is inclined to overlook their defects of style in consequence of their respectability and the associations they call up." So far as pleasure to the eye was concerned, Audrey preferred Minsteracres, but she felt there was something very substantial and county-like about the house at Breamore. There was a strange feeling in her heart as she looked at it and thought that, if all went well with her, there, under that roof she would live and die—that, perhaps, at that moment she was looking at the window of the very room she should die in. She could not think of death now. Please God, she would live many a long happy year first—happy, and with him. She was sometimes afraid she was a selfish girl to make herself so glad with the thought of living in a house which Dudley could never enjoy—for, when there, Minsteracres would always be

before his eyes. Surely some great good fortune would ere long fall to Dudley's lot, and all this trouble then would be forgotten?

The Templemores had not called on them. Dudley was alternately bitter and contemptuous about this. If he and Audrey had not lost their money, he said, the Templemores' family coach would long ago have brought them over in state to call on their new neighbours, ask after their son (whom they must know the Wentworths had so lately seen at the Cape), and endorse all the proffers of friendship so liberally made by him. As it was, no doubt they meant to keep away. The clergyman of the parish had called, and Mr. Davison had been over from Dorminster, but none of the "county people" had been, or meant to come. Audrey took these slights, if slights they were, with resolute equanimity—the only county gentleman she cared for "held his head to other stars" at present. When he came home there was no fear but that he would soon find his way to Minsteracres, or wherever she might be; and at any rate their great loss had brought with it one compensation—

there was now nothing to part them, no fear of Dudley objecting. She always sought the war news with great eagerness, but there was none of much importance. The troops, however, were meditating an attack on Sandilli's position in the valley of the Keiskamma, so next mail would bring something definite. Had she ever any doubts of Brian's constancy, any fear of his changing? Such an idea never entered her mind. She would have staked her existence on his truth; but she had great fear of something happening—a vague feeling that the happiness of spending her life with one she loved so much as Brian could not be granted to her: it would be too great, too perfect; jealous destiny would not calmly see her thus placed above all earthly care, but would interpose in some utterly unexpected manner to rob her of all she counted on. Being superstitious, she asked questions of fate every hour of the day, using every object under heaven which met her eye as a portent or an oracle. If she saw a bird, she said, "If I see another bird of that kind before I can count twenty, I shall marry Brian ;

if not, I never shall." If the word "No" was seen by her unexpectedly, she took it as an evil omen, while "Yes" made her heart dance. Poor child! she knew she was foolish, but she could not make herself wise.

When she came back from her expedition to the high-road and her glimpse of Breamore Court, she took the path into the park which led to the corner where the two estates touched and had been so insufficiently divided. Now the weak part of the fence had been strengthened, and all trace of former inefficiency had disappeared. She met the little river coming along, tumbling and tossing itself against the stones in its narrow bed in the most consequential manner, all because (as she thought) it had been to a place where she wanted to go but could not; for it flowed through the park at Breamore before it entered that of Minsteracres. It whirled young leaves along; it washed them to one side into shallow bays where, after turning leisurely round once or twice, they consented to become stationary, and adorn the margin with their points of vivid green amidst the drift of dead sticks and straws.

“Ah!” thought Audrey, when she saw these leaves sailing down, “one might send letters thus. At least, if *he* were in the park at Breamore he might put a little letter in the stream, and it would reach me. If I walk as far as that birch-tree without finding a bit of white paper lurking by the edge of the stream, I shall not marry him; if I find a bit, however small, I shall.”

Her breath came quickly—she was vexed with herself for making all her future depend on such a little thing. Having once committed herself thus, she felt it did depend on it; she always felt there was a certain finality about decisions arrived at in this manner. Down by the water’s edge, in a shelving bay between two rocks, she did find a piece of paper, and she took it and held it with delight. It was a morsel the housemaid, Polly Pemberton, had used for a book-mark; she came here often to read, and she had a reason for doing so which it was well Audrey did not know. This was the place where she used to meet young Mr. Templemore, and in spite of everything and

every one she could not forget him ; and when she had time, she came here to dream about him, or with a book which she never could read for that same dreaming. Audrey stepped on her book now : she had not seen it before. She stooped to pick it up, saying as she did so, “ If that book has a title which bears at all upon my thoughts, and is favourable to my hopes, I shall take it as a doubly good sign, coming just after my finding this paper too.” “ Greenwell’s Works ”—that was inconclusive and disappointing. No, it was not, for green was the colour of hope, and the other syllable was encouraging—but of course she must look inside. “ The Two Friends ”—her heart sank and she breathed heavily, but she always cheated a little in these searchings into futurity. “ I meant of course to try three times,” said she, opening the pages again in the middle. “ The Patience of Hope ”—the very name of patience chilled her. She consulted the book once more : “ A Present Heaven.” “ Ah, yes ! ” cried she joyfully, “ a heaven on earth with him ! ” She began to think she was losing her senses ; she must

really put an end to this absurd habit which was growing on her, of making out of every single thing a sign and a portent: but why should she not have comforting assurances given her? Perhaps there might be something in it; and as she idly turned the volume over she saw the name "Brian Templemore" written on the title-page. It was a heaven-sent proof that the future meant well by her; and she sat on the bank under the overarching trees, fingering her newly-found treasure caressingly, lulled by the sound of the water, happy in her quiet thoughts.

Presently Polly came. She had forgotten the book the evening before; she wondered if it was there now, or spoilt by the dew. She saw Miss Wentworth with it on her lap, and modestly said it was hers, and that she had come to look for it.

"Yours?" said Audrey, turning to her and then to the name on the title-page lying open before her, and Polly felt an explanation was demanded.

"It was a book of young Mr. Templemore's, miss; he knew I liked reading, and he once gave me that and some others."

Polly looked so pretty, so timid, and so afraid of her young mistress thinking ill of her, that Audrey was quite sorry; but she was not thinking any ill of her, but only what an angelic being Mr. Templemore was, to be anxious even to do good to a girl like Polly. No doubt this was true charity, a delicately thought-out act of kindness; for she (poor thing!) had, as Audrey knew, but a sorry, slavish life of it with that cross old aunt of hers. No doubt, if she herself knew more of the poor people about here—if she could go into the cottages—she would hear more of his generous deeds.

“You have spoken to him sometimes then, have you not, Polly?” said Audrey, suddenly looking on Polly as invested with certain reflected angel tints.

“Yes, often, miss—very often,” added Polly, with a subdued consciousness of how very charming these stolen conversations had been; “but I did not know you had ever seen him, miss.”

So Audrey told her where they had met and of his shipwreck. She was pleased with

the deep interest Polly could not help showing in her narrative, and told her more and more—Polly listening all the time with a heart full of pitying love. Each girl spoke, as it seemed, with the most perfect frankness and openness, yet each was doing her very best to keep her own secret, and succeeding. As for Polly, Audrey took it as a matter of course that a girl born and bred in a country village was sure to look upon any of the neighbouring squires or squires' families as little lower than the angels, so it never for half a moment entered into her head to think that there was anything strange in a girl of her station being so familiar with one so superior to herself. She therefore suspected nothing of the old love affair, and Polly suspected nothing of the new one. Polly needed a little expansion after the long-continued repression her aunt had exercised, and as she knew she should never again be on the terms she had been with young Mr. Templemore, as she called him, she felt that she might allow herself the indulgence of hearing and mentioning his name. The two girls stood together

by the side of the little stream, and each was drawn to the other. Polly, in her lilac print dress and white apron, with a cap on her pretty brown hair, which was as much of a compromise as could be effected between her aunt's desire to hide every bit of it with a white-bordered, amply frilled, stupendous edifice in opaque muslin, and her own to put something of the size of a florin in lace upon it, was a very pretty object. She was slim and tall and shapely, with clear bright eyes between blue and grey in colour, and a pale thoughtful face, which was lighted up by expression to beauty. All her features were good; but the most noticeable were a well-formed straight nose, with a touch of haughtiness in its curves, and a very beautiful mouth and chin. She had not always been so pale and thoughtful, or so destitute of smiles as she was now. In the happier days of her life she had had a bright colour, and a merry, light-hearted way of meeting the world. She never felt that was gone—she looked forward to some undefined good which the future was to bring to her, and was waiting for it, and

could have been reasonably content now, had old Mrs. Pemberton been willing to let her forget, even for a few hours, what a very giddy, senseless girl she had been to "go and have thoughts of the young squire," or to give up assuring her that "it was well for her she had promised that there should be no more of such work; but that, promise or no promise, she would soon have put an end to it."

Polly plied her duster, and tried to forget and clear away from her own memory, too, all clinging recollections of what had been so happy and delightful while it lasted. She was pledged never to speak to young Mr. Templemore again, and she meant to keep her word, but that did not mean that she would "keep company" with any one else. She held her head high, and looked straight before her when she came out of church, no matter how many bashful young villagers might be thinking that if they only met with a little encouragement they would not mind setting Miss Polly home.

"It is very pretty here, Polly," said Audrey, whose eyes had been dwelling with pleasure

on the winning face of her humble companion.
“Do you often come here?”

“Yes, miss—at least, no—I mean I do sometimes,” replied Polly, whose mind was struggling with the difficulty of not exactly knowing what she had better tell, and what it was more prudent to hide, and who had indeed nearly forsworn this place, since going there had brought her into such disgrace with her aunt.

“It is the nicest place to sit in I have seen yet, but I think I could not read here, Polly; I should be sure to forget to look at my book.”

“Yes, miss, I sit and study a great deal here myself.”

Audrey did not know that the word study is used in the north by those in Polly’s rank of life when they wish to say think, and asked her what special thing she studied.

“What is to become of me,” said Polly ingenuously, “whether I am just to live on here with nothing but trees to look at all my life, or whether I shall ever have a chance of seeing anything of the sort one reads of—towns and

great sights, I mean, miss. I often think that me and the river both seem in a hurry to get out of the park."

"Just here," replied Audrey, to gain time to think what Polly could mean by her discontent, "it is in a hurry to come into it; but, Polly, why do you want to get away? Are you not happy?"

"Yes, miss, I suppose I am, for when aunt's in a good humour there's nothing to make me otherwise—but I tire somehow of always doing the same thing. I clean a thing, and it does not stay clean; and I dust a thing, and it wants dusting again to-morrow. It is not like doing anything really; it is just as if I did nothing, and I get weary of it."

"And yet you do your work so nicely," said Audrey, who had often admired Polly's thoroughness. "Should you like dusting and cleaning a house of your own, Polly?" For she thought every girl in her state of life must warm to that idea.

Polly coloured. "Miss, I don't know. The things I like I shall never have; the things I have are not quite what I fancy—but there's

many a one worse off than I am. I had better go in, I think, or aunt will miss me and be cross.

“ Say I kept you, if she is. Stay a minute, I like talking to you.”

“ Women-people are worse off than men,” sighed Polly. “ You see, if we have anything to put us about, it just has its own way with us, for we have nothing to take our thoughts off. All the work we have won’t prevent us from studying and plaguing ourselves from the time we get up till bed-time.”

Audrey smiled as she thought of one advantage which this poor little girl’s uncongenial work brought with it—fatigue, and therefore sound sleep: this by her own confession. Audrey herself did not find that going to bed always put so satisfactory an end to “ studying.” But why should Polly be “ put about ? ” Why want to get away from a place where all was fair and good ? This was the very first time that Audrey had come in contact with the spirit of unholy restlessness and discontent so rife in this nineteenth century. She could hardly understand it, her

own being a tranquil nature, to which life anywhere, so long as those she loved were with her, was an even current of unquestioned joy.

She thought there was something wrong about Polly's repinings, but did not feel herself competent to lecture her. And yet, to Audrey's quaint fancy, there she stood looking pale and fragile, and drooping her head like a wood anemone, instead of lifting it up and looking bright and full of business like a wild strawberry.

"You and I must talk some other day, Polly, if you really are obliged to go now," she said, for she saw the girl seemed anxious to return to the house.

"It is my work, miss. I am sure I don't want to go; I had rather by far——"

"Be a lady like you," Audrey saw was what she wanted to say, but she left the sentence unfinished.

"My idea, Polly, is that the true way for you and me and every one else to rise is always to do our work, whatever it may be, ever so much better than we are expected to do it."

“Yes, miss,” replied the girl dubiously, “only if you were me, you would like to rise quicker than that, and in rather a different way perhaps.”

How Audrey would have parried this direct thrust is uncertain, for at that moment Dudley appeared in the distance, calling “Audrey, Audrey!” with great energy. Gathering up her skirts she ran to meet him, looking beautiful as she ran, which so few women do; but with her every movement was graceful.

“I want to tell you something, dear child,” said Dudley, who was fond of talking patronizingly down from heights.

Tell her something! Her thoughts flew to Brian Templemore; she looked anxiously at Dudley. Had bad news come?

“Little goosey!” said he, “it is nothing so wonderful when you do hear it. Don’t look so frightened. It is only that you have some relations you are not aware of, that’s all.”

And then he explained to her that his father had a half-sister who had, when young, offended him so deeply by a very unsuitable

marriage which she had chosen to make, that he and Mr. Philip Wentworth had both refused to forgive or see her, and had kept to their resolution ever after. It had happened in this way. When she was seventeen, she was staying at Minsteracres. Old Mrs. Wentworth, of Minsteracres, Mr. Philip's mother, was alive then, though infirm and, as it turned out, not able to look after her pretty young niece properly. Aunt and niece had frequently driven over to Dorminster, the nearest town, to spend long hours in elaborate shopping; and somehow or other Miss Adelaide had, unnoticed by all, made the acquaintance of a very handsome junior partner or clerk in the principal draper's shop there. He had waited on her perhaps, or come to rub his hands and pay court to the stately old lady from Minsteracres; but they never could discover how he had gained the opportunity of declaring his sentiments for Miss Adelaide, or indeed, of having any sentiments to declare. It had been done somehow; and suddenly, without any warning, she eloped with this man, got married, and came back and settled

down as a tradesman's wife at Dorminster, in the very shadow of Minsteracres as it were. They could never forgive her for this, nor for her marriage, nor for "the stealthy cunning which must have gone to bringing such a marriage about." Both Colonel Wentworth, the brother, and Mr. Philip Wentworth, the cousin, cherished anger against her to their dying day.

"I have heard papa mutter when the name of Adelaide was mentioned," said Audrey, "but I never guessed why—and you never told me, Dudley," she added reproachfully.

"Why should I? I am sure it is a very distasteful subject—you are far better ignorant of it."

"But such a near relation!"

"Bah! Near! I never counted her a relation at all. Why should I? Our father did not; he never thought of any of them. Just lopped that branch off at once—and he was right. She was only a half-sister, and she behaved ill."

"But, then, why tell me now?"

"Because the son of this Copeland, who

ran away with our Aunt Adelaide that was, is coming here in ten minutes."

Audrey could only look her surprise—her surprise at everything, for Dudley spoke so calmly.

"And you," continued he, "had much better keep out of his way—stay here in the garden, or anywhere you choose, until I see what he is like. He is very probably not presentable. Anyhow, it might save you embarrassment if you did not see him. It is better to be able to say hereafter that you never saw him."

"How do you know he is coming?"

"Davison is here; he brought a message from him, that he was in the neighbourhood and would do himself the pleasure or honour—I forget which—of calling at five. That was to give me the chance of refusing to see him if I wished. You see, there are some signs of gentle blood about him. Well, he is coming at five, and it wants only ten minutes; only that is your fault, for I have been looking for you for twenty minutes at least."

"And are you going to be friends with this

Mr. Copeland?" inquired Audrey, wondering whether it was right so to reverse their father's decision on that point.

"Friends! No, dear child! but recollect that, poor or rich, I am the head of the family, and I do not think it right to repel any overtures for reconciliation made by any member of it."

Audrey could only admire him. Before they reached the house, Mr. Davison met them with the intelligence that Mr. Copeland had already arrived and was in the library; and when Dudley hurried away to see him, Mr. Davison thought those papers he had come to examine might very well wait a little and let him have five minutes' talk with pretty Miss Wentworth. She would ask questions about the Copelands. Did Mr. Davison know them? And then she blushed, and was afraid he would be offended at being asked that question. But Mr. Davison knew them quite well, and thought them all charming, and said that the Mr. Copeland who was visiting them now was the very finest fellow he had ever seen! He was the mainspring of every good thing in

Dorminster—handsome, clever, active, energetic, and honourable. Nothing could be done in Dorminster without him—nothing at all!

“I wonder we never heard he was a cousin before,” said Audrey not unnaturally.

“My dear lady, you would not have heard of him now if your brother had not had such misfortunes. Copeland is a splendid fellow!”

“Do you know Mr. Templemore—the owner of Breamore Court, I mean? Is he pleasant, or proud; or what kind of man is he?”

And in answer to this she learnt, though Mr. Davison wondered why she changed the subject so abruptly, that he was a kind, good-hearted, well-meaning man, not proud at all; not remarkable, indeed, for anything but a tendency to be rather out at elbows, which phrase Mr. Davison had to interpret to her.

“In want of money!” thought Audrey. “Oh dear, oh dear! and I have just lost all mine!”

“And his wife?” she asked eagerly.

“A pleasant lady enough; rather worldly,

but in a benevolent, large-hearted way, because everything is so much more agreeable and comfortable for everybody, yourself included, when you do the best you can for yourself."

Here her questions stopped. She dared ask nothing about Brian. She had had a glimpse of Mr. and Mrs. Templemore after church one day, and she thought Mr. Davison had rightly expounded their characters. She was obliged to return to the Copelands, though she would much have liked to have some of Mr. Davison's admiring power bestowed on the absent Brian. Nevertheless, she put her questions about the Copelands with a genuine feeling of interest. The world had gone well with them, Mr. Davison said, and old Mr. Copeland was now the senior partner in the firm in which he had begun as a clerk—in fact, he was the firm, and an immensely rich man;—he was very kind-hearted and generous, and this desire of his to be on good terms with herself and Dudley was probably the very best thing for them which could have happened.

Audrey drew her head up. She had not forgotten that she was Miss Wentworth, of Minsteracres. It was very good and forgiving of these shop-people to wish to be of service to them; but how could they? She hinted gently at this to her companion, for she was very jealous of Dudley's dignity.

"Oh, my dear young lady," said he humbly, "I only mean that every one is the better for having a few well-to-do relatives."

"We don't want their money," was on the tip of Audrey's tongue, but she restrained herself. Nay, she was ashamed of herself; and Mr. Davison, who read her thoughts, and who now knew how narrow the dividing line between the Wentworths and ruin was, wondered at her spirit and freedom from anxiety. He kept her out of doors as long as he could: he tried to make himself agreeable to her, tumbling into pitfalls every moment because he drew his conversational inspiration from the objects which met his eye. Everything prompted congratulations, and he found himself triumphantly pointing out to Audrey the overwhelmingly luxuriant

show of fruit on the trees, fruit which it would never be her lot to enjoy ; or the money to be gained by cutting down timber in a year or two, when it would not be theirs to sell. It was hard to keep off these subjects, for all was well-kept and prosperous, and gave promise of returning the money which had been spent on it seventyfold into—whose bosom ?

Audrey was very kind to him. She did not forget how very good he had been to her the day she was so anxious about Dudley. She let him conduct her here and there, and up and down, and took an interest in all he said, until the heart of the man of law grew lighter and lighter, and widened until it felt itself capable of holding the very wildest schemes for the future. He was by no means an old man—a friend would have guessed him to be five-and thirty ; an enemy would not have ventured to name a higher figure than forty. His mother had been teasing him to marry for a long time. Hitherto he had never cared to do so ; but he thought if ever such a thing did happen, he would try to find some one as like Miss Wentworth as might be. Her love

for her brother had won his heart—had gained the approval of his reason, too. It was a good sign when girls loved their brothers; but—he would do nothing in a hurry.

Audrey was tired of being in the park, and she was sure Dudley must be tired of sitting with a commonplace, dull, shoppy-kind of a man, with nothing in his head but ribbons and laces; or, if he were a deep thinker, say calicoes and flannels. By this the reader will see that she did not rely much on Mr. Davison's opinion of her cousin's merits. No, if he had been half as nice as Mr. Davison said he was, Dudley would long ago have been out to seek her, to introduce her to him. It was very kind of him to be so thoughtful for her, and keep him out of her way. And then, for the first time, she bethought herself of the day when she would have to confess to the Templemores that a man who kept a shop in Dorminster was married to her own father's half-sister; and officers—Brian was half an officer—were of all people the most intolerant of any breaking down of the barriers which guard them from unseemly contact with those

below them. One deep sigh of anxiety ; and then she hated herself for being so low-minded as to think of such things. Even if she had fifty uncles in business, she, Audrey Wentworth, was the same girl she had been when he fell in love with her ; and if she had such cousins, she would not disown them. She was beginning to long to see this Mr. George Copeland. She wished he would come out.

As if in obedience to her wish, Dudley and the stranger came and stood in the doorway of the house, watching a fine chestnut horse prancing and curveting towards them, in spite of all the "So, so's" of the gardener turned groom. Mr. Copeland was tall and fair, taller than Dudley, and very gentleman-like. She saw that at a glance ; and when they came closer she liked his face still better ; it was so open, so manly. His eyes were blue and unmistakably honest ; his forehead broad and full of character ; his hair crisp and brown and curly. Copeland was a good name, after all ; and really this Mr. Copeland looked every inch a gentleman, and a very handsome one too. But her observations

were interrupted by his approach. He took off his hat and bowed as he came near, but he held out his hand and shook hers warmly when she gave it, and there was a look in his face which claimed cousinship at once.

Audrey had been rapidly schooling herself, as he advanced to meet her, to be very careful to receive him as she would receive—well—an equal, for he was sure to be uncomfortable on first being introduced. He uncomfortable! he conscious of inferiority! he ashamed of his calling! There was something about him which proclaimed at once that he was one who was neither to be patronized nor condescended to, nor yet who required to have his feelings spared; for he had no feeling but such as any gentleman might have on meeting for the first time a new acquaintance who had a certain claim on him, and decidedly did not for one moment believe that it was in the power of any calling or employment whatever to render a man who pursued it honourably, unworthy of the fellowship of his own better-born relatives. Straight-

forward, manly good-will beamed in his face ; and when Audrey took his hand, she felt herself a mean little worm to have had such thoughts of him.

“ Mr. Copeland is, as you know, a distant cousin of ours, Audrey,” said Dudley, in a tone which would not have been so lofty, had not Mr. Davison been there so inopportunately.

Audrey accepted the new cousin at once. She liked his voice, admired his smile, and in five minutes she was charmed to think herself thus richer by a new relation.

Dudley was, of course, Conservative ; Mr. Copeland, as might be expected, a Liberal. Dudley shrugged his shoulders a little when his cousin, after admiring the house, and saying a good word for Jacobean architecture, observed that, after all, so far as art went, the Stuarts were to be regretted. Dudley contended that in every way they were to be regretted ; and, all things considered, Mr. Copeland was too polite to remind him that the Wentworth who bought the property from the Roundhead Parliament could not have

cared much for the Stuarts. They strolled round the house. Mr. Copeland had never seen it before, and took great interest in it now. Audrey was agreeably surprised. She had always thought that people in business gave all their minds to trade and money-making; but this cousin was intellectual, and alive to everything. He had an eye for nature, too. He could not have learnt in his shop that *Pteris Aquilina* comes up in a loop, a loop through which you can put your finger; and that if you dig down carefully you will find the perfect, though only partly developed leaf, firmly fastened in the earth. Audrey hardly believed it, and tried the experiment; and Dudley looked on as she did so, divided between wondering how nature managed it, and a feeling that it did not much matter how ferns came up. But presently it turned out that the new cousin knew more about their own domain of Minsteracres than they did, for when they were at the side of the house where some ruined foundations and walls had been turned into a bit of ornamental gardening, and dressed out in ferns and rock

plants, neither Dudley nor Audrey knew that the ruin was due to two jealous sisters, who, unable to satisfy themselves about the equal partition of their inheritance, had actually resolved to divide the whole building, stone by stone. They had begun with the chapel, and had not been persuaded to relinquish their plan until they had destroyed the whole of it. Stone by stone it had been divided between them.

It was odd that Dudley, with all his love for Minsteracres, had not ferreted out this legend. Even Mr. Davison had heard of the ill-tempered co-heiresses, but he cared for the story from a legal point of view.

“And I may tell my father that you will come over to Dorminster to see him?” said Mr. Copeland, when he said good-bye to Dudley. “What day may I say? I know he is very anxious about it.”

“To-morrow; I shall be busy next week, so I will come at once. I will walk over; I have no carriage,” said Dudley, looking as if he were very proud of the deficiency.

“May I send for you?” said Mr. Copeland.

“You are coming to please my father; do let me send for you. Perhaps, then, Miss Wentworth would drive with you; that would be a great pleasure to my mother—indeed to all of us.”

And he looked so genial that Audrey wondered how Dudley could refuse him so stiffly. But he did, and said that he preferred to walk—it was only twelve miles; and that for the present he would rather Audrey stayed quietly at home.

But when Mr. Copeland was gone, Dudley did not find much to say against him; and when the shop was named, though he shrugged his shoulders, he only said—

“Now that we have lost Minsteracres, it is little consequence what happens to us.”

And he did go over to Dorminster next day; and when he came back, and Audrey asked him what his uncle had wished to see him so particularly about, his answer was—

“To offer me a junior partnership in his business.”

“His shop!” cried Audrey, aghast.

“ Yes, his shop. Only he does not say shop, mind ; he calls it his place of business.”

“ And you ? ”

And her breath was held in suspension.

“ I am going to think it over ; but you need not look anxious, my good child—take my word for that.”

CHAPTER XI.

“Counter and Clubb were men in trade whose pains,
Credit, and prudence, brought them constant gains;
Partners and punctual, every friend agreed
Counter and Clubb were men who must succeed.”

CRABBE.

WHEN Mr. William Copeland brought to his humble home in Dorminster the lady who had so grievously offended all her relatives by marrying him, he would have been very much astonished if a peep into futurity had been granted to him, and he had seen himself and her in the luxurious and beautiful house in which he dwelt in after years. The young people were very much in love with each other; perfectly content to continue to live and work in the same lowly way in which their married life had begun. But there are people on whom from the very beginning all good gifts are heaped; and the head of the

business in which William Copeland played his humble part had the sense to see he was a steady, trustworthy fellow, with a splendid power of organization. Year by year he gradually raised his salary, and then gave him a considerable share of the profits. But he never meant him to have the whole of the business. He always intended that, when he himself was gone, William Copeland should be the right-hand man, the working partner, of a firm of which the bulk of the profits should go to his own son, a fine young fellow of whom any father might well be proud. But when Mr. Stapleford died, his son was too fine a young man—too proud of himself—to have anything to do with retail business. He abhorred the idea of keeping a shop. To be a merchant was permissible, but to own a shop was simply out of the question! Neither did he like looking to the rock from which he had been hewn; and as he could not avoid doing that in Dorminster, where the massive gold letters which set forth the names of Stapleford and Copeland above the windows in the High Street were graven on the minds of all the

inhabitants for ever and ever, he left his native town, went into a merchant's office in Manchester, and Mr. Copeland slipped into the business by default. For such conduct on the part of his only son had never even been taken into consideration by the deceased Mr. Stapleford.

Time had passed since then, and William Copeland had made a stupendous fortune. He might have retired and played at being county gentleman years before the opening of my story; and he would have liked well enough to do so, had it not been for one thing—his whole heart was in his business. He had a genuine pride in it; and with perfect right, for it was conducted on the very highest principles of honour and honesty. He gave the utmost care and thought to seeking out the very best goods that conscientious labour could produce, paid their price ungrudgingly and punctually, dealing year after year with the same people; and knowing that when he recommended an article as likely to wear well he was telling no lie, and that it was as good as he, by

strenuous endeavour, could set before his customers. He paid his shopmen well; he was studious of their comfort, and he was not ashamed of his calling before God or man, because he knew that all he sold was what it purported to be, and that each day was filled by a good measure of faithful work. I do not pretend that those around him were always entirely alive to his worth, or willing to relax at all in his favour certain very strict social laws by which Dorminster was governed, and which at once and for ever excluded any person who derived his income from a shop from all right to mix with professional men, or upper class idlers, or indeed with any but his brother tradesmen, on any footing whatever save that of business. Now this, though an obvious necessity in most cases, was rather hard in this; for William Copeland was at any rate as well educated as most of those who so unhesitatingly shut their doors upon him. His wealth enabled him to live like a gentleman, and profit by every refining influence, but his place in Dorminster was peremptorily marked out for

him, and there was no power of altering it. He recognized the fact that he was thus excluded, and did not rail against the laws which caused him to be so ; nor had he much time to regret what he lost owing to their enforcement, for punctually at nine he went to his place of business, and there he stayed till six. From time to time he ran out to give an hour to some meeting, or attend to some business connected with the town—for he was very public-spirited—but when evening came, he was glad to go home and eat his dinner quietly with his wife.

He lived about a mile out of Dorminster, in a very charming house which, ten or twelve years before, he had built for himself. It stood in a large garden, and held within its walls many an element of civilization—drawings, pictures, books, and flowers. Besides these, the Copelands had horses and carriages, greenhouses, and a Mudie box of their own ; so that being black-balled by an exclusive book-club had been somewhat of a benefit to them.

However exclusive society in Dorminster might be at the time I am writing about,

when William Copeland had made his fortune, its laws were merciful compared with those which were in force when he began life there, eight and twenty years before. Then, as now, the clerical element predominated; but at that time the dean and chapter of Dorminster were in possession of magnificent revenues, which they were allowed to apply to their own use and benefit, without much more than a murmur from without. And they did so apply them; each of the twelve canons having incomes of from two to five thousand a year from his prebend, and a good living besides; good houses too in Dorminster, where, hedged in by strong barriers of the respect due to place and wealth, they lived doing nothing to deserve either, and exciting constant wonder in the minds of thoughtful men as to what could be the reason for their existence. Some of them were sons-in-law, some nephews of bishops, who, if diligent husbandmen of the Lord's vineyard, can always provide for three generations; and there they were. And having gained this high prize of their profession, there they remained, resting contentedly on

that their one achievement, and seeking only to maintain by generous and handsome house-keeping the honour of a Church which had been alive to merit in their persons. For three months in the year each canon was what is called in residence, when he gave a series of entertainments to the inhabitants, in which they were classed according to rank; and to most of the guests, going to dine in the college was much the same as going to Court. The canons exacted the most punctilious deference from those beneath them, especially from the minor canons. Mr. Copeland well remembered how, when he first knew Dorminster, a minor canon, if he even caught a distant glimpse of a canon of the superior kind crossing the road at the very far end of the street, was expected to remove his hat, make a sweeping bow, and remain uncovered long enough to render his salutation a matter of certainty; or he might expect a rebuke.

And what a contrast there was in the appearance of the two sets of men—the prebendaries so sleek, so portly, so far above the

baser cares of life, so secure of their multiplied thousands and elegant leisure; the minor canons so thin, so careworn, so hard-worked from trying to eke out their modest salaries of £150 per annum by clerical work of any kind. They were in all things kept becomingly down by the canons, and when they were asked to college dinners, they were either asked in a body, or diffused amongst the townspeople in parties composed of guests of the third and fourth degree of merit. Canons and county people formed the first, the upper professional class the second degree; but when the givers of the feast got to the third and fourth, the classification was more recklessly performed, those people having no particular rank, station, or feelings to be careful of. This was fifty years ago; but even to-day, the most ordinary men who belong to any close society believe themselves possessors of some divine right of superiority.

At first, when Mr. Copeland was asked into the college at all, it was with the town council to a dinner of the sixth order of merit, and the wives of these men of the

sixth order were invariably left at home. By degrees, as he worked his way upwards, he was asked to meet those who were looked upon in the college as "better people"; but he never achieved a party of more than the fourth order of merit, and only two of those.

From the very first, Mrs. Copeland declined to accompany her husband to any party of any kind in college or in town. She, from her birth, might easily have got into society a little above the rank of her husband, but she could not have done much more, and she steadily declined all visiting. Why should she submit to be made of small account by persons to whom she had never been allowed to be introduced in the old Minsteracres days? She would not, and she was quite content to live far away from all these scenes of petty strife. But, twenty years later, this her decision considerably darkened the social outlook of her only daughter, Osmunda: a pretty, chestnut-haired, bright-cheeked girl of seventeen, who had just come home from school, and who thought living in Dorminster much the same as being

buried alive. Her name was an odd one; Mrs. Copeland had chosen it for her child in a kind of spirit of reaction against Caroline and Augusta, Adelaide and Wilhelmina, and other names of the same class, which were in vogue before Edith and Ethel and Mabel were pounced upon by the masses.

Osmunda was a high-spirited, ready-witted girl, who had been well educated, but not in Dorminster; she had been sent away to Brussels. And now, poor child, she was the only person in the Copeland household who was not quite happy—she could not always bear up against the little mortifications and deprivations entailed on her by her position as a tradesman's daughter. She was very much ashamed of caring for the trivial slights put upon her, but had not yet arrived at the requisite degree of coolness to hide all she felt. She had brought the painful facts of the social status of the Copeland family clearly before their eyes. Before she came, they had so lived as almost entirely to avoid having these facts presented to them. But when Osmunda came back from a lively foreign town, where she had

numerous rich and aristocratic schoolfellows, who had liked her and been intimate with her without inquiring into what her father was, and found herself shut up in a large house in a dull country town with no young companions, she was almost more than dull. She had carriages, but no one to visit; horses, but nowhere to go; duetts, but no one to play them with her; a beautiful voice, but no one except her own family to listen to it. She was, as far as accomplishments went, a thousand times better educated than any of the exclusive young ladies in Dorminster who would not know her. In those days it was rare to speak French well; Osmunda spoke it perfectly. No one at that time thought of learning German; Osmunda knew it thoroughly, at least to the extent of its lighter literature. She dressed well, though very, very quietly, for she dreaded the reproach that "she had only to take what she wanted out of the shop." She was pretty, lady-like, lively, clever, and good-tempered, and yet none of the young ladies would associate with her; not even the daughters of a minor canon liked

to be seen walking so far as the length of the High Street with her, although various good works were constantly throwing them together.

I said she was good-tempered; but, honestly, the treatment she was undergoing was endangering that said good temper's existence. It was enough to make her ill-tempered, she often declared. Was she to know no one at all? They wanted to make her look on the other tradesmen's daughters as her only proper companions. That was the very hardest part of it, for the other tradesmen and their families were not at all like the Copelands. They were the usual illiterate, passively honest, passively dishonest set of men you frequently see in little country towns. They would not pick your pocket, but they had no objection to put a little sand in your stomach instead of the sugar you intended eating, or to adulterate your bread with alum, or your wine with something worse, or to wink at the conversion of any staple of food from a wholesome into a deleterious compound. None of them thought it right; many of them would have been glad to act differently, but they could

not be the first to sell only those articles which were genuine ; so they let things take the usual course, merely saying with more or less bitterness, "that no one in trade had any chance of making a living if honest." And the wives of these men were what might be expected, and their daughters dressy, ignorant vulgar girls, whom poor Osmunda could have had no pleasure in knowing ; and yet the upper classes drew a rigid line, and said, "We gentlefolks of course intend to keep together, and you tradespeople must naturally be content to do the same."

This home-coming of Osmunda from Brussels brought with it, therefore, the first flaw in the Copelands' content. What they could bear with perfect indifference for themselves, they did not like to see apportioned to their daughter. Besides, poor child, she was the only one on whom it thus pressed. The elders wanted no society, and George was a man, and not affected by social decrees as a woman must be. He went everywhere and knew every one ; he was as it were the very life and soul of Dorminster, no one

could do anything without him. He had not only wonderful business talent and energy, but the art of governing, of leading, and persuading; and, more than all, he often proved the sincerity of his efforts by the most generous deeds, and carried difficult points by sheer personal sacrifice. No one ever thought of treating George Copeland with anything but respect and honour. He was asked indifferently to any and all of these parties, according as this or that great man wished to show gratitude for what he had done, or to try to influence him as to what he was going to do. But no man living can, by any exercise of civic virtue or effort of will, force wife or sister into a station the outposts of which are commanded by women—women bent on not conceding it to her; and, alas! when Osmunda was asked out at all, it was to some very humble party. The upper classes have a broad way of settling such things: these and these people are in the same rank of life, and have no right to object to meet each other. George Copeland did not in the least mind whom he met—he was working

in one way or another with every one in Dorminster, and glad to have the opportunity of discussing this or that project with them ; but he did object to see his delicately nurtured sister exposed to the chance of being burdened for life with the acquaintance of people who could not utter a dozen consecutive words without some outrage to grammar, who put their knives in their mouths, and who would, after meeting her once, have spoken of her as "Little Osy" for the rest of their lives. He felt that he had a right to be as particular for her as the canons were for their daughters, and he would not let her go. He was sorry she was dull, and promised to keep some time disengaged to walk and ride with her ; and of one thing, he said, he could assure her—the Dorminster young ladies were intensely stupid, and so far as he was concerned might be as exclusive as they liked.

Presently Miss Osmunda went to pay a visit in the south, and came back engaged to be married to the son of a wealthy merchant. Young Mr. Lauriston was at Oxford, and he was going to be a clergyman, and so

she considered her future assured. Nay, the dream of her life now was, that by some caprice of fortune (the Lauristons had a great many influential friends) her betrothed might turn into a bishop, perhaps even be Bishop of Dorminster; and then they would live in Dorminster, and return good for evil, or evil for evil, to all who had troubled her peace in these early pre-episcopal days.

When the Wentworths came to Minster-acres, that event shook the house at Beacons-hill to its very foundations. All felt drawn to the young cousins who had had such trouble, and who were, as report said, so worthy of love and sympathy. All the Copelands wished to be reconciled to this branch of their family. But if the Wentworths had not lost their money, George Copeland would never have gone over to visit them; nor would he have gone when he did, had he not seen how much importance his father attached to his doing so. There was much about Dudley Wentworth's conduct, as described by Mr. Davison, to excite William Copeland's admiration. He liked his unflinching honesty and

steadfastness. He knew how he was depriving himself of everything but the bare necessities of life to pay off Philip Wentworth's liabilities; he knew that he and Audrey had travelled down from London third-class, and had refused any advance of money from Mr. Davison; and he felt a strong sympathy for the young fellow, who was acting much as he himself would have done in a similar case, and who was his own wife's near relation. This boy, he thought, seemed made of the stuff he wanted in his shop; if he would take a place in it he should have it, and if he did his work well he should soon have a better. And then this good deed, though he did not let himself think much of that, would wipe out such old scores. Dudley's father had despised him because he got his living out of this same shop, had behaved very cruelly to his sister for the like reason, and had not even looked on his ultimate success and prosperity as mitigating circumstances, but had kept coldly aloof from them till his death. Now, this much contemned shop should be a harbour of refuge to Wentworth's orphan

children, and he and Adelaide would look on them as their own. He thought of this scheme until his mind was full of nothing else but a passionate desire for this generous vengeance, and a fear that Dudley's pride would never let him stoop so far as to consent to his proposal. Dudley had told him, when he walked over to Dorminster to see him, that his idea was, if possible, to save enough out of the wreck of Minsteracres to pay for completing his education at Oxford. He would go there in October, and wait till he had taken his degree and qualified himself for orders. That done, he meant to try to get a curacy with a good house, and take pupils; and if he accomplished so much as that, he looked for no further advancement in life, for there was not a person in the world likely to be interested in his promotion. If the boy's heart was set on being a clergyman, there was no more to be said; but if he were simply choosing this profession because it was the only one open to him, there was no harm in giving him a wrench in an opposite direction. There were plenty of clergymen in Dorminster for Mr.

Copeland to point out as examples of how people got on in the Church. Certainly, since the Ecclesiastical Commissioners had descended upon the revenues of the dean and chapter, things were being more equalized. All future canons of Dorminster were only to have a thousand a year each, all minor canons two hundred and twenty. But it was no easy matter to get even so much as a minor canonry; and as for taking pupils, you must have capital to do that. And even if Dudley did get a curacy with a good house, surely he must know that that meant being left in sole charge, and therefore having a great deal of work to do and no time for pupils. Mr. Copeland ruthlessly pointed out all these things to Dudley, who could not help admitting that the prospect was dismal enough; besides, he was not even certain that he would be able to raise money to pay for his divinity year. And yet the shop was too bitter a pill! Mr. Copeland offered him two hundred a year for two years while he was working in the office and learning the business, and a share in the profits hereafter if all went well; and that,

Dudley knew, meant present ease of mind and future luxury and independence. For of course, if ever he did such a thing as accept this, all would go well—only he would have to change very much before he could bring himself to accept it.

“You won’t do it, darling Dudley?” said Audrey, seeking him out in the gallery, whither he had gone to be alone.

“Of course not! But let me think it quietly over.”

“Oh, Dudley, all the thinking in the world will never make me look on it except as the most cruelly degrading thing that could possibly happen to us. Why, we should be shopkeepers!”

“I am afraid we shall be beggars if I take a curacy; and surely, darling, that is worse.”

“Dear Dudley,” said Audrey, “I hardly understand you. You were only going to be a curate before Mr. Wentworth left you Ministeracres; and how happy we used to make ourselves in India, when you first came out, by thinking of the dear little house we would have, and how comfortably we would live

together in it. We never thought being a curate such a bad thing then."

"Oh, but we were very ignorant then. Now that we have once had a taste of something better, I don't believe we could ever squeeze our ideas back into the mould which once held them."

"But Mr. Copeland only offers you two hundred a year."

"That is to try me. He would soon give me more. I should be a partner in no time."

"But still it would not be very pleasant to get our money in such a way. Do write and say you cannot hear of such a thing. You are surely not thinking of it seriously? What would people say?"

But that argument had not much weight with Dudley.

"People," said he, "are not apt to trouble themselves much about the decisions of those who have already fallen so low as to have such questions presented to their consideration. Even as a curate, what sort of a station could I support?"

He was not thinking seriously of this

scheme, but still he felt that he, well-born, well-bred, and good-looking, could do with impunity many a thing another man could not do without loss of position—that is, he could do it if he held his head high all the time. But suppose he, from motives of expediency, chose to “degrade” in life; that did not mean that he was to remain a tradesman for ever. “Apprentisage extinguisheth not gentry,”—he would make a fortune, and then triumphantly resume his place in the world. This was no more than any gallant ancestor of his own might have done in crusading times. Suppose, imitating these knightly warriors of old, he made a vow to suffer this or that privation till he had performed what he had sworn to do; and suppose that his vow was to wear the base form of a tradesman until his family shrine was freed from desecration, that is, till he had got his own estate of Minsteracres back again;—where was the harm? What right had any one to look down on him? What did it signify who did look down on him? For a distinct object like that, he could undergo any amount of

humiliation. And yet, though he could succeed in placing the matter in this picturesque light, he could not bring himself to make the plunge.

Audrey was wretched when she saw him wandering restlessly up and down the garden, growing paler and more irritable each day which passed, and more and more reluctant to admit her to his counsels. She had no fear of his accepting the offer, unless driven to desperation; she well knew how repugnant such a mode of existence would be to him, but she knew that another call from the bank was impending, and she was certain he was much perplexed to know where to find the money. She little knew how sorely perplexed he was; for even the first call had only been paid by raising money on the land, and now he feared all would soon have to be sold. To aggravate his difficulties, this was a very bad time for a sale. The failure which had ruined him had ruined many others; one disaster had followed another till a panic had ensued, and for months after there was a period of commercial depression unparalleled in those days.

This was certainly no time to attempt to sell anything. How Dudley mourned over Philip Wentworth's most pernicious activity; how he wondered that any one, with Minsteracres and all that the possession of it implied, should disturb a placid state of well-being by dabbling in speculations of any kind. What could he want more? Philip Wentworth must have had a trading taint in his blood, or he could not thus have been led away. Dudley himself could not have done it. Even now he, a ruined man, hated the idea of bettering his fortunes by any aid from trade, and was going to refuse to do so; and yet there were times when he thought this offer of Mr. Copeland's might be a special guiding of Providence to help him. He was so distracted by doubts of this kind; so harassed by his difficulties, and by having to make up his mind on such a number of disagreeable matters; so mortified at feeling any hesitation at all on such a subject, that when, to get rid of the incubus which was weighing him down, he went into the house and wrote a grateful, but absolutely decisive, refusal of Mr. Cope-

land's proposal, and saw it signed and sealed, he felt a happier man than he had done for days. The thing was settled, and he was glad of it; and he went to look for Audrey, and gave her a heartier kiss than any she had had from him since this idea had come under discussion. And she, poor child, bloomed afresh, for she had not understood that Dudley had never quite seriously dreamt of accepting this situation, but had only given ample thought to the matter from a strong sense of duty, as became a man with little chance of receiving many other offers of appointments which would secure a livelihood for him and his sister in the years to come, and whose habit was to look on all sides of a question, and cut away all ground for future self-reproach on the score of haste. She had actually been afraid he was going to do it, and had made herself miserable, for it had seemed a heart-breaking sacrifice to let Dudley go into a shop. Morning, noon, and night she had watched him, and thought it would kill her to see her dear handsome brother reduced to that. Her feeling for him had even thrown

into the shade all consideration of how such a course would affect her position with Brian Templemore, and yet that had troubled her also ; for so far as her fortunes were concerned, surely this would have been a most disastrous step. Thank God ! the letter was gone, and the horrible idea banished from their minds !

Mr. Copeland did not answer. Dudley feared that he had offended him ; but the old gentleman had the matter far too much at heart to take either a denial or offence easily. He was ill, and his desire to have his own way about this had become as obstinate as sick men's fancies proverbially are. He had made up his mind that he was going to die, and he felt that he should die happily if he carried this point. He meant thoroughly well by the boy ; only let him accept this situation heartily, and show some aptitude and application, and he should in the end have a place in his business which would make his fortune. He determined to wait a while and try him again. He had no hesitation about renewing the offer, for Dudley had been so frankly

explicit about his miserable, forlorn hopes of fortune, that Mr. Copeland felt he need have no scruple in pressing the boy for his own good. What good could come to him in any other way? Ten days later, therefore, he sent Mr. Davison over to Minsteracres, charged to repeat the former proposal, and to use every argument likely to ensure success. Dudley's face clouded over the moment Mr. Davison began to speak; he was reasonably grateful, but said he would much rather the question was not again brought under discussion. He confided to Mr. Davison that he hated all trade, especially retail trade, and more especially still that branch of it in which Mr. Copeland was engaged.

“And yet, my dear young friend,” replied that gentleman, “you don't seem to take into account the princely fortunes these men make. Have you any idea of what Mr. Copeland is worth?”

Dudley knew these men made fortunes; had no idea what Mr. Copeland was worth; looked for the moment as if he did not care to know into how large a ball money so earned had

gathered itself together. But Mr. Davison felt sure he could touch him, and said—

“Well, roughly speaking, I should say William Copeland was worth three hundred thousand pounds.”

“Surely not made in that shop?” cried Dudley, beginning to think William Copeland was inviting him to make one of a band of robbers.

“Oh no! and yet in one sense, yes; for, of course, it was the shop which supplied him with capital to begin with. But William Copeland, Mr. Wentworth, is a wonderfully lucky fellow. Whatever he touches turns to gold. If he buys even a field, it is sure to be wanted for some building, and sold at a profit; if he gets hold of a bit of bad land, it turns out well with him, for they are certain to find coal, or iron-stone, or something under it. Bless me, if I had his luck! But money makes money—if you have only something to work with, you soon get plenty.”

“I will tell you what I will do,” cried Dudley, with a sudden idea and equally sudden outburst of decision. “You say Mr.

William Copeland has set his heart on my taking a place in his shop, and that my refusal has made him ill. Now, I will tell you what I will do. I will accept his offer on one condition: if he will buy Minsteracres when it is sold, and if he will give me a pledge that if ever I am in a position to redeem it he will give it up to me, I will do what he wishes."

"You will?"

"I will; only mind, if I work well he must take that into account and pay me well, for if I do this, I do it with a distinct object."

Mr. Davison maintained silence: this was such a new idea.

"Don't you think he will do it?" asked Dudley eagerly, not liking any reticence or holding back now that he had screwed himself up to such an effort.

"It is not that I think he won't, but that—You see I am so astonished, and so will he be; and there may be some trouble about getting the money together to buy it. Business, you see, is a child which requires constant feeding, and it won't do for him to take all he has out of it."

“Humph!” said Dudley, with impatient want of politeness. “I have told you what I will do; now you must help him to manage this if he wants to do it. He can leave most of the purchase-money on mortgage. Don’t let me be a better man of business than you.”

CHAPTER XII.

“Who may not be a fole if that he love?”

CHAUCER.

“We see that trees bear no such pleasant fruit,
There where they grew first, as where they are new set.”

VIT. COROMBONA.

“Is it really true, Dudley?” said Audrey, in a voice full of anxiety and dread.

Dudley heard the broken accents in which she spoke; he saw her tearful but inquiring eyes. He would have liked to throw his arms round the child and kiss her and love her; but, poor fellow, he was so near breaking down himself that he dared not, and only said, half roughly—

“Don’t tease me, Audrey; my mind is made up. Besides, it has gone too far. You have read Mr. Copeland’s letter; you must see there is no going back now.”

Audrey sighed deeply, and sat down without speaking.

“You might remember,” said he, “that this costs me quite as much as it costs you.”

“Far more, my darling, I know; and that is why I am so very miserable about it. At least, that is one great reason,” she added truthfully.

“Then you might let me alone,” said he reproachfully.

“I will, dear,” replied Audrey. “I will say no more; it shall be as you think best”—and this although she felt all her future happiness was slipping away from her!

He kissed her and silently left her. His word was given, and he had no intention of recalling it. Nor did he mean to indulge in useless repining, nor to listen to recapitulations of all the disagreeable things which inevitably lay before him; that would only increase indefinitely what he had to endure. He had counted the cost, he had made his decision, and all that remained to him to do was to face the future like a man.

But Audrey could not be quite so brave. She

was full of vague fears that against her will she was being drawn into something which would cause her to lose Brian Templemore. Suppose this should place an insuperable barrier between them? Yet surely, if he loved her, he would not give her up because her brother was in a shop? She would still be the same Audrey. If he liked her at the Cape, he surely would like her here at Minsteracres, in Dorminster, or wherever she was? Only, perhaps, his family might try to make him recall all that he had said to her. Whilst she was perplexing and worrying herself thus, the clock on the mantelpiece began to strike, and in a moment she instinctively said—

“If it strike an even number, he will love me just the same; if an odd one, he won’t, because I am a draper.”

It struck eleven, and then (for, somehow, she could not help cheating a little whenever the oracles she consulted were unfriendly) she said—

“That need not really be taken as a bad sign, for I made a mistake in the way I put it. It ought to have been, ‘If it strike an even

number, he won't love me; if an odd, he will'—for people always declare that there is luck in odd numbers, and so, of course, I ought to have said it in that way."

Sometimes she was vexed with herself for giving up nearly every thought to him as she did, but she could not help it. That long sea-voyage, during which she had had little else to do but retrace the past and form hopes for the future, had made her fifty times more in love with him than she would otherwise have been.

Dudley had given her a letter from Mr. Copeland to read. It had been brought by a special messenger early in the morning. She had read it once; now she read it again:—

"DEAR NEPHEW,

"I accept your conditions. All shall be as you wish; only remember that even when in the comfortable circumstances in which, thank God, I may be said to find myself, a man has to think twice before he is sure he can raise the large sum required for such a purchase. Davison and I have,

however, taken the matter seriously into consideration, and the result is that I will buy Minsteracres; and if ever you make your way sufficiently to enable you to buy it back from me, I promise to arrange so that it shall be surrendered to you; only let me entreat you not to build too much on the chance of regaining it. Remember that where one man succeeds in business a hundred fail; and though I pray for your success, I should wish you to like the work you undertake for its own sake. But I have no doubt you will do so, and work well; the very condition you make implies you intend it. Davison will be with you very soon, to talk on some business matters; meantime I hope, my dear boy, that you and your sister will learn to look on me and my family as affectionate relatives. I look on both of you as my own children from this time forth. My wife wishes very much to see her niece; will you not both come and spend a week or two with us?

“Yours ever,

“WILLIAM COPELAND.”

When Dudley put this letter into Audrey's hands, he said, "You will observe, when you read this, that Mr. Copeland speaks of himself as our uncle. Of course he has no right to do so, for he is only the husband of our half-aunt, but let us henceforth always address him as 'Uncle.' It is clear that he wishes it, and having made our one big concession, we may readily give up all minor points. You hear me, Audrey; it is our duty and we will do it."

Dudley had fondly hoped that his "Uncle" would, by arbitration or valuation, or in some other manner approved by legal men, ascertain the value of Minsteracres, and become master of it, without ever letting it go into the open market. But "business" with a "business man" is first nature, and overrides every other consideration. Even when the heart suggests a generous action, that action must be done in a legitimate business-like way, with a great deal of signing and sealing and delivering; and though Mr. Copeland meant to buy Minsteracres, he had no intention of paying a fancy price for it. He would buy

it by open competition, and then he would know he paid its proper value. Everybody is aware that—

“The real worth of anything
Is just as much as it will bring.”

And if it was a bad time to sell land, he could not help it; it would be no greater loss to sell it to him than to any one else.

Business is indeed business; and, once having said yes to this bargain, Dudley found that everything else went very quickly. He and his sister were whirled on by some agency over which they had no control to the conclusion of the sacrifice. All the steps for Dudley's admission into his uncle's shop were taken as rapidly as might be. Mr. Copeland was ill: he wanted everything concluded, and to see Dudley fairly set a-going with his work, and, if possible, liking it before he died. Not that he was going to die; but he was ill, and believed so. He lent Dudley a horse, and at first he used to ride in and out to Dorminster daily. And when Audrey asked him anxiously if he liked being there, his face darkened, and he only said, “Don't ask me

about it ;” but she gathered that he did not stand behind the counter and measure laces and ribbons. That was what she had dreaded at first, and had not dared to ask about it—she knew nothing about trade—but had secretly undergone agonies, picturing the day when the Templemores would drive over to “Copeland’s” to buy things ; and perhaps Brian would go with them and would see Dudley, whom he had known in such different circumstances at the Cape, immersed in this degrading employment. It was degrading to any black-coated creature to cut lengths of muslin, measure yards of flannel, and recommend wares about which he ought to know nothing at all ; but how much more so for Dudley !

Audrey was not the only one who was watching Dudley’s conduct at this time with interest. His uncle was wrapped up in observing him. George, too, was interested ; and Osmunda, who usually rather laughed at his dignified ways, and called him Dudley the Magnificent, eagerly collected facts concerning his demeanour during working hours.

But that was admirable. True, everything had been much more easy of endurance than he had looked for. He was not exposed to the eyes of the giddy crowd who fancied they had shopping to do, and idled away hours and hours in doing it. He was screened from view in a little glass room hung with almanacks, time tables, and maps, which gave him their friendly aid, and secured for him the seclusion he coveted. He was mastering all the difficulties of bookkeeping and writing business letters, examining invoices, etc., etc., from morning to night; nor had the surface of his finger and thumb ever been ruffled by feeling the texture of any species of "dry goods" whatsoever. After all, so far as he was concerned, it was only the name of trade which was disagreeable. He had a pleasant ride into Dorminster, on one of the best horses in his uncle's stables; entered the obnoxious place in the High Street by a private door; had a good luncheon at one with his uncle and cousin, in their own room; and rode back to Minsteracres in the cool of the evening, to find Audrey leaning over the park gate,

watching for him, or walking along the road to meet him. On these occasions he dismounted and made her ride home ; and he walked by her side, leading her horse for her, and feeling positively happy in her love, and the tranquillity which this work and the hope it gave him for the future had brought with it. He was too unfamiliar with commerce to know much about ways and means, or to be able to count up what a long time it must of necessity take him to earn money enough to buy back Minsteracres. He only saw that, somehow or other, a very large fortune had already been made in that shop, and he was vaguely hopeful on this point. His uncle and cousin were gentlemen, and treated all about them, down to the very smallest errand-boys, as gentlemen also ; and Dudley liked them for it. The more he saw of their way of managing their business, the more he admired them ; and he was occasionally even conscious of a certain feeling of self-respect, which had begun to steal over him since the time when he had actually undertaken to labour for his own living, and

pride in belonging to a business worked honestly by honourable men. Mr. Copeland was quick to see this, and a great delight it was to him. He said he knew in a moment that there was good stuff in that boy; and now that he often spent an evening with them, they had every facility for judging of his character. They had only seen Audrey twice, and that at Minsteracres.

The time, however, was rapidly approaching when she and Dudley must come and take up their abode permanently in Dorminster. They had already chosen a house there, but they delayed their departure as long as possible. But when great staring white bills of sale began to be pasted on all the gates and doorways facing the high-road, they decided that it was time to go. They spent the period of the sale in their uncle's house, and heard the sum which he had paid for the house and land discussed with callous fortitude, if such a thing can be; and then came the sale of the furniture. But even Mr. Copeland, with all his love of business, could not let that go on. He bought the whole of it at a valuation, and

then called Dudley to him and insisted on his taking as much of it away from the Hall as would furnish his new home in Dorminster.

Alas and alas ! it was easy to fill their new home with furniture and not make a gap in the appearance of the rooms at Minsteracres ; but a cabinet here, an inlaid table there, a pretty chair or two, and some books and china, made the new room shine with somewhat of the light of home, and cheered Dudley's heart at once when he saw them with their air of solid comfort and dignity. Then the most personable and distinguished of his ancestors, male and female, looked down on him from the walls ; and many a valued memorial of bygone days found a shelter under the roof which was to shelter him and his sister until the long struggle was decided, and they either knew they had regained their old home or that they must make themselves content with this.

Flower Gate, in which their house was situated, was a long street running down to the bridge and market-place. At the very top of it were eight or ten houses, added as if by

an afterthought, and the Wentworths' was No. 4. Theirs, like the rest of these, was modest in appearance and rent, but well suited to two people with a small income, and a strong determination not to exceed it. It contained a good dining-room and two kitchens downstairs, an airy drawing-room and bedroom on the first storey, three bedrooms above; and that was all. But they only paid thirty pounds a year for it. And there was a pretty little garden at the back into which their drawing-room looked, and beyond that a green meadow, and then a bend of the river, and on the other side of the river a sloping hill crowned with a fine old wood. This was at the back of the house. The front opened to the street. But in this upper part of the street there were no houses opposite; only a bright green slope planted with a few brisk young poplars, which helped to hide that grim monitor of evil-doers, the county gaol. A wilderness of red roofs lay beyond, and above all towered the noble cathedral.

"I have seen many a worse house than this standing at a rent three times as large,"

had been Mr. William Copeland's first remark when they showed him its various merits and demerits. He thought the view of the cathedral from the balcony, which ran the whole length of these eight houses, worth ten pounds a year more rent, and said so, and advised them to make the room which opened on to it their drawing-room ; but Dudley had resolved that their drawing-room should look to the river and woods. So the other was made into Audrey's bedroom, and a very pleasant room it was. And yet, though the rooms were bright and airy, the house looked very small and humble, especially after a place like the Hall at Minsteracres ; and it was well that they had been minished and brought low before they came to Dorminster, for they could only afford to keep one servant, and she was a hearty girl of Irish extraction, who always said "Yes, love," when she spoke to Audrey, and "dear" when she spoke to Dudley, and thought any endeavour to induce her to renounce this habit unfriendly.

They met with very little that was really friendly from any one but their uncle and his

family. One canon's wife, who was a sister of Mr. Armitage, of Bellosguardo, came to call, but it was at twelve o'clock in the morning; and though she pressed Audrey to go to see her in return, and tell her everything she could think of about the Cape and her brother and his wife, she did not forget to add that she would like her to come early, even as early as eleven o'clock if she could, for she was always in at that time.

Audrey smiled somewhat bitterly at the thought that now she must not be seen in superior houses after luncheon; but she bore it silently, feeling certain that after the very first letter Mrs. Wiltshire received from Mrs. Armitage, their acquaintance would be put on a more satisfactory footing. How her thoughts turned to those Cape days, when she was thought a worthy companion for ladies, and had had the great happiness of attracting the love of such a man as Brian Templemore! How little the silly people who despised her for her poverty were aware of that! How ashamed they would be of themselves when they knew it! What a happy girl was she

who did know it, and who had that delightful little secret of her own to take away the sting of every care! And yet she was often anxious about him. Mrs. Armitage designedly never sent her much war news in her letters, nor any Cape papers with full details of what was passing. But Mrs. Wiltshire knew of no reason for reticence; and, probably because she felt she was not going to do many kind or neighbourly acts to the Wentworths, she was the more liberal of these newspapers, which she sent by an imposing-looking footman, with her "compliments and Miss Wentworth need not trouble to return them"—which, being interpreted, meant that Mrs. Wiltshire did not want to have her door unnecessarily frequented by persons of Audrey's humble fortunes.

Poor Audrey! If it had not been such a great thing for her to get Cape news, and occasionally see that name she loved so much in print, she would have kept away from the Wiltshires altogether; but for the sake of the papers, and because of the connection with the Armitages, she went from time to time,

and, in spite of herself, Mrs. Wiltshire grew very fond of her. The papers were at best a doubtful pleasure, and often only served to rack the child's heart with anxiety, for the news was seldom good. The rebellion seemed very hard to put down, and Sir Harry Smith did not appear to be making way.

Here was a bit for a timorous mind to brood over. It was an extract from a memorial to the Governor:—"Within the last six weeks the enemy has swept off from the district of Somerset alone 20,000 sheep, 3000 head of cattle, and 300 horses; since the commencement of the war 200 farmhouses on the north-eastern border have been reduced to ashes. The frontier is receding westward, so that Burgher camps and laagers, which but a few weeks ago were regarded as occupying secure positions, are now mere outposts; and these too are, one by one, being abandoned as too weak to resist the tide of invasion."

Or the *Monitor* took up its record of disaster as follows:—"The ravages of the enemy continue to be most distressing.

Everywhere the same melancholy tale of woe has to be repeated. Flocks carried off, homesteads burned to ashes, the most vigilant of the colonists barely escaping with their lives; the incautious everywhere shot down in ambush."

And, alas! as she read this, she could not but think what a world this would be to her if one rarely absent from her mind should have been among the number of the incautious ones; and at the mere thought her heart stood still.

It was hard that she dared not go and speak to her brother of all her hopes and fears. Ever since she had left the Cape, the wish of her heart had been to do so; it seemed so wrong, so unloving, to keep anything from Dudley. But it was so difficult to say to him that she could not help believing that Mr. Brian Templemore meant to make her an offer when he returned home. That was all which she could say. Dudley would of course ask why she thought so. And what could she affirm in answer? When his words came to be critically inquired into, he had really said so little that

was definite. And of course Dudley would inquire into them, and then it would turn out that she had given her heart away to a man who had done nothing more than look as if he loved her, and who had said little things which made her think these looks must be true.

Suppose, when she had unfolded her slender story, Dudley was incredulous; then indeed her spirit must have died within her. Suppose he were angry, or said with some feeling akin to contempt, "Really, Audrey, my child, I gave you credit for more sense than to trust so to people's looks. Looks go for very little in this world; people look anything sometimes!" And then, if he had proceeded to hold up the thousand and one little nothings which had gone to the building of her happy castle in the air to the light of reason, and she had at last heard him say, "Well, Audrey, I wonder you should attach so much importance to a few words of civility and admiration; I can't bear the idea of your being so foolish as to go and lose that dear little heart of yours in this way. Forget about it, my

darling ; I am sure that would be the wisest thing to do."

That was how she knew it would be, and that was what held her back. There was no telling Dudley part of the truth ; it must be all or none. So she was obliged to keep silence, praying only that the day might soon come when Brian would return and tell all himself.

It was the end of July when the Wentworths took up their abode in Flower Gate, and positively by the middle of August that business-like man, Mr. Copeland, had let Minsteracres, furnished as it was, for a term of seven years, to a south-country gentleman of the name of Heriot, who came prepared to hunt, shoot, and enjoy himself. He was some relation of the Bishop of Tomatoland. Dudley winced a little at this, and at the idea of letting the house at first ; but on second thoughts, he was delighted that his uncle's name as owner was thus so well kept out of sight : the house might be let for one term after another until the glorious day arrived when he should possess his own again.

Months passed—uneventful months—during which they saw no one but the Copelands, and now and then Mrs. Wiltshire. The papers which that lady continued to bring began to be more hopeful of a speedy termination of the war than those received in the summer had been. Audrey waited patiently.

George Copeland came to see them from time to time, and from one or two suggestions he made, Audrey very soon discovered he was a man of taste. So now he was always consulted on matters of decoration; and he and Audrey between them, and by the work of their own hands, made the new house very pretty. Then he showered benefits upon them just the kind of benefits which are such a real help to those who like refinement and have no money. The Beaconshill gardener came one morning every week to work in their garden, and never came empty-handed; and gradually their little piece of ground became a delight to them, and their balcony blossomed forth into a green bower of climbing plants.

“Who has done this?” asked Dudley some-

times, when a new bit of artistic arrangement struck him.

“George,” was the answer.

“What a queer fellow he is to find time for that !” rejoined Dudley, who never could understand how George could be so indifferent to all that was so attractive to himself.

George was a power in Dorminster, but he had not the least idea of using his power to serve his vanity. He was content to be the quietest, discreetest, most hardworking member of that much-despised body, the town council. The ability which he wasted in that humble chamber in quietly working for the improvement of his own town would, if he had chosen, have enabled him to enter and hold good his place in Parliament ; and Dudley was lost in wonder that a man who had wealth and powers of business and speech should be insensible to the temptation to do so. But George had a hearty old English horror of pushing himself beyond his natural sphere. If the position had been forced upon him, he would have done his best to be equal to it.

In the mean time, Dudley knew that the

Liberals in the city were anxious to find a candidate. The chances of such a candidate would be small, and Dudley would not wish them to be otherwise; but if the town were to be disgraced by a Liberal member, George might as well be the one as not. George knew that it would involve more "dirty work" than he would stoop to do;—he preferred the river, and the humble but hard task of leading various densely dull and obstinate brothers in office to see that water should be pure, light worthy of its name, the streets clean, etc., etc., and that the best way to keep the numbers in the gaol and hospitals down was to fill the schools. So he worked on contentedly in the lines in which his lot had been cast; and, when he had time, lent a hand to the decoration of the house in Flower Gate; and with such success, that Audrey once or twice found herself thinking that really this new home of hers was a place in which she need not be ashamed to receive visits from people of any rank or standing—that it was a perfect *bijou* residence, or whatever the fashionable appellation may be. But

one day, when she and Osmunda were sitting on the window-sill, peeping through their scarlet-runners and canariensis plants, she saw the Templemores' carriage roll past on its way to the county courts, which were close by the gaol. Mr. Templemore looked ill and tired; Mrs. Templemore in all the pride of health and rich dress. She was lying back on her cushions, and she turned away from the humble row of houses where Audrey lived, as if it were impossible that anything which need detain her eye could be found there; and when Audrey saw the expression of her face, she realized at once into what an *oubliette* she had fallen. There was a wondering, wistful look in her eyes, as she followed the dusty progress of the carriage, that was sad to see in one so young.

"What a haughty person that Mrs. Templemore is!" exclaimed Osmunda. "I can't bear her face!"

"They say that in reality she is very pleasant," replied Audrey.

"Dudley says you met her son at the Cape. Tell me all about him. Did you like him?"

If Osmunda had not been watching the Templemores' carriage returning after depositing Mr. Templemore at the courts, she might have seen that Audrey was much the same colour as the scarlet flowers which screened her from the sight of all passers-by.

"Yes, I liked him," said she, in a low voice.

"I dare say," continued Osmunda, "that in a foreign country Mrs. Templemore might be pleasant too. That is the way with English people, they unbend when they are from home; but I am glad you thought him agreeable. You have not told me what he is like."

Not by any imaginable process could Audrey have prevailed upon herself to describe Brian, except in general terms; but Osmunda only asked the question by way of saying something, the current of her thoughts had already set in a different direction.

"I wonder whether the Templemores have been 'county-courted,' as the people say here. Perhaps they have, and that is what has brought them here. You know there is no getting them to pay their bills."

In the autumn Osmunda went from home for a long time, to visit the Lauristons and other friends. Audrey therefore was much alone. Many a letter had passed between Mrs. Armitage and Mrs. Wiltshire, but Audrey, though treated more and more kindly, was still only an early morning acquaintance. She was very far from being dull. She accepted her position, and made the best of it, and on no account must the reader think that she sat ruefully in a corner, pining for the day when Brian Templemore would return and lift her out of Cinderella-hood. She was a very practical little woman, and she held that the chief aim of her life at present was to make Dudley happy, and to prevent him from feeling as many of the discomforts and annoyances entailed by living in a small house with a rough maid-of-all-work as was in her power to do. She got up early, always came down looking prettily dressed, though very likely her dress was only a cotton one. The first thing she did was to see that the breakfast table was neatly arranged with flowers from their own garden,

specially gathered to adorn it, or a leaf full of fruit, and by that time Master Dudley had descended and found all ready for him. She always contrived to dismiss him for the day satisfied on one point—that this sacrifice of his had not told on her happiness. After his departure, she helped Miss Bridget Maloney to make the beds and dust the rooms with impartiality, that is, visit the forsaken nooks and ledges; then she pulled out her cookery book, a recent purchase, and made a pudding or tart, and gave an eye to the dinner generally. She felt as happy as possible all the time she was thus engaged, for was it not all for Dudley? and when he liked her confections, or praised some pretty little bit of decoration in the house, her joy was intense. She began to think she had never really been happy before, but had led a very useless, foolish life, and it was well she had been obliged to do something better. In the afternoon she could sit down in her own drawing-room, and with books which George Copeland lent her, and the handsome furniture from Ministeracres, and the family portraits on the walls, feel her-

self as good a lady as any of those who passed by her windows, though they might hesitate to know her. But their absence or presence made little difference to Audrey, for when she had time to feel the need of friends, there was one far away, the thought of whom drove everything and every one besides out of her mind.

CHAPTER XIII.

“My mistress mine is light of hand,
And dainty, fair, and calm of mien ;
Her head alone bespeaks a queen ;
All things grow trim at her command.”

MARZIALS.

“It is very good for strength,
To know that some one needs you to be strong.”

E. B. BROWNING.

IT was Christmas time, and Audrey was spending a long day at Beaconshill. Mr. Lauriston was there on a visit, and the Wentworths were specially invited to meet him.

“Well, Audrey,” said Osmunda, when they were alone, “tell me what you think of him.”

“I like him ; he is very kind and good, and very fond of you, Osmunda.”

“Do you think he will ever be a bishop ?”

Audrey only knew the Bishop of Tomatoland, but, judging by him, she thought there

was a good deal of the stuff of which bishops are made in Mr. Lauriston. "Sterling sense, solid depth, great stability of character"—he was a man who could only be described by using massive adjectives, but he thoroughly deserved them.

"Would it not be heavenly if ever he was made Bishop of Dorminster, and we lived in the palace at Edenbridge? You should come and live with us, Audrey, and we would have such fun when we sent out our invitations; we would mix the people all up so—canons and minor canons and inferior clergy! Oh, wouldn't it be delightful! Just fancy how they would look—the canons, I mean. Why, our parties should be just as mixed as heaven itself, though I dare say they think they will have a bit of that railed off for themselves. And you know, Audrey, it really might happen that Edward became a bishop. It is a long story to tell you all about the influence his family say they have, but I am sure there is some chance of it."

"I believe you are marrying him just for the pleasure of sending these invitations out,"

said Audrey, not in the least speaking as she did believe, but saying it as a wicked jest; for she had such high ideas of how people should marry.

“I really am—at least, that was one reason I took him,” said Osmunda, nothing abashed; “that, and wanting so much to get away from Dorminster. Don’t look so shocked, Audrey. You don’t know the style of marriage you may make yourself until the time comes. Besides, Edward and I understand each other; we are all right. I want you to tell me if Dudley likes Edward; I am half afraid not. Do tell me—you may speak the truth.”

“Of course he likes him,” said Audrey, bethinking herself afterwards, though, that Dudley had hardly said anything about him.

Mr. Lauriston was a good-looking man, with fine, well-formed, heavy features. He was very silent, and always appeared to be ruminating on deep subjects. Every one thought he was profoundly learned, and that some great work would spring up after all this meditation, whereas very possibly he was thinking of nothing at all. However, that

was a point which never by any chance could be determined, for he was a man of so few words that he never betrayed himself, and those he did utter were oracular. He showed his pleasure in Osmunda's society much as a cat testifies its admiration for the superior being to whom its love is given, by rubbing up against pieces of furniture in her neighbourhood, only Mr. Lauriston generally rubbed the light ones over. He was certainly a surprising contrast to Osmunda, who was graceful and nimble of mind and body. Sometimes he tried to bring himself down to her level by some playful utterance; but when Mr. Lauriston tried to be playful, the effect was much as if an elephant had walked in to afternoon tea, and his youth—for he was only twenty-three—made his ponderosity the more remarkable. But then his gravity was most likely the very thing Osmunda best liked in him. Extremes always meet, and she had no reason to suspect any deficiency in the way of intellect, for he had taken very high honours at Oxford. Indeed, she was very proud of him.

It was rather a dreary day, and Audrey was much preoccupied. She knew that old Mr. Templemore, as Brian's father was generally called, though he was only fifty, was very ill—that he had been ill for months; and to-day she had accidentally heard that, even in September, Mrs. Templemore had written to urge her son to return home because of this illness, and because his father was making himself miserable from the intensity of his desire to see him. Any day now might bring Brian home. Perhaps he was even now hurrying with all speed down to Breamore, and she would meet him once more! No one noticed how absent she was. Mrs. Copeland, a handsome, delicate-looking woman, was knitting a soft fleecy shawl, and rarely feeling impelled to say anything to break the silence.

Osmunda was chattering to Mr. Lauriston, who basked in her presence, wearing a smile always on his lips, a smile in his eyes. Her playful conversation stirred his sluggish depths agreeably, and he made these smiles of his play an important part in the dialogue.

Osmunda's conversation was like a playful discharge of semi-offensive missiles. "You know you are tired of your visit to us? You know you are bored with my talk? You know you don't like music. You know, Edward, in your heart you like being rather idle." Perhaps he did not know all these things, but she knew she must make these improbable accusations in order to provoke him to the use of speech. And he blinked and smiled, and shook a pamphlet he had in his hand at her, and assured her of his love and content and delight; and then she sent new showers of assailing weapons of the same kind at him, the wounding power of which was just strong enough to keep him from dropping away into some abstruse subject of contemplation, which would have made him hopelessly bad company.

Dudley, George, and Mr. Copeland all came in together about five o'clock. The level of conversation rose immediately, and this household, which before their entrance had been cut off from all external to the four walls of the drawing-room which enclosed

them, suddenly found itself taking an interest in most of the questions of the day, and anxious for information on all points bearing on them. They found Audrey sitting a little apart from the others. George and she were such very good friends she thought it quite natural he should go to her side when he noticed how quiet she was, and that she took little or no part in the conversation.

“You have been reading?” said he, taking a book which was lying near her.

“Yes, a word or two; but I don’t much care for that book, though the reviews say it is such a good one. It is quite new.”

“I am not a great reader of new books,” said he. “I generally follow Roger’s advice: ‘When a new book comes out, read an old one.’”

“Ah yes,” was her answer, “I know your books—you have lent me so many of them.”

“Won’t you have some more?”

“Don’t make a blue stocking of Audrey,” said Dudley, coming to them. “Do you know times would change for me if you did? Would you believe it, that child cooks my dinner?”

"I can believe any good of her," said George warmly and admiringly.

"Oh, nonsense, Dudley!" cried Audrey; "Miss Maloney cooks the dinner. I only just give her a hint now and then."

"But her neat cookery! She cut our roots in characters,
And sauced our broths, as Juno had been sick,
And she her dieter,"

said George, altering his hes into shes without any hesitation.

Dudley looked down affectionately at his sister. Mrs. Copeland caught the expression of his face, and said—

"William, dear, do you see that boy Dudley? He has just the same kind look in his face my poor brother had, has he not?"

"Dear Adelaide, how can I tell? Your brother, unhappily, did not give me many of his kind looks. But I am truly thankful I have got that boy here—and Audrey too; it is like having two more children of our own. And they all seem so fond of each other!"

"Come, Dudley," said Osmunda, finding conversation flagging, "won't you sing? Audrey, will you make him?"

“How is Mr. Templemore to-day?” asked Mrs. Copeland. When any one was ill in or near Dorminster the whole community took it to heart.

“Better, I believe; but I have not heard much to-day.”

“Then it is a pity they have hurried that young man home.”

“That young man has not hurried himself,” said Mr. Copeland; “he might have been here if he had.”

“Oh no! indeed he could not” cried Audrey, who had twice bodily, and thousands of times mentally, traversed that pitiless length of space. “You don’t know what a long way it is!” And again she became very silent, thinking of days gone by, or faintly foreshadowing days which might come; and in this manner passing some time, during which she was left undisturbed.

“But I wanted you to sing, Audrey,” said Osmunda at last. “Do, come.”

“Presently,” said Audrey, for her heart was strangely full.

“Does your head ache, Audrey dear?”

asked George again, coming softly behind her, and sitting down by her side. His voice was very kind and sympathizing, just as if he knew she was much in want of help and comfort.

“Yes, but not much. I was thinking.”

“Do you want to be left in peace?” he asked.

“I am in peace,” replied Audrey; and looking into his honest, kind grey eyes, she thought how nice it would be if she could but tell him all. There were times when the burden of a secret, the keeping of which cut her off from all pity and good counsel, was almost more than she could endure. She was sure he would be like a brother to her if she did tell him; but she no more dared to tell him than Dudley. “I am in peace,” she therefore said, “only thinking a little.”

“Not unhappily, I hope?” said he.

“Oh no; not really unhappily.”

Presently he went away, though only to shield her from a renewal of Osmunda's entreaties to sing. George was always doing quiet, thoughtful things for other people.

While he himself was singing, Osmunda

took his place by Audrey's side. "What a funny little creature you are, Audrey. If any one saw you I am sure he would say you were in love."

"What is being in love like?" inquired Audrey rather drearily, feeling a curious mixture of excitement of spirits, sinking of the heart, strong hopes, vague doubts, which might have done something towards answering her question.

"It is different to different people. It makes me gay; it makes Edward silent and grave—at least I think it must be that which does it; it makes George kinder than ever."

"George? I did not know George was in love?" said Audrey gently.

"Then it is time you did," said Osmunda, smiling; "you might have done so."

"But you forget I have not known him long, and that I have never seen him with any young ladies."

Osmunda looked inclined to laugh; but George came to them with a *Dorminster Chronicle* in his hand, which a servant had just given him.

“The Lord Bishop of Tomatoland will preach on behalf of the Tomatoland Missions, in St. Stephen’s Church, on Friday evening next.”

“Then he is here!” cried Audrey, “and we shall see him and Mrs. Heriot.”

“And your dear friend Gus!” said Dudley.

Audrey was for a moment vexed with Dudley, and very thankful to George, who was such a gentleman that he never even looked at her to see how she took this.

“Ditchinford Ironworks have declared a dividend of sixty-five per cent.’” read he.

These were certain ironworks which had been sold off to pay a debt at the time of the breaking of some north-country bank, and had passed into other than the original management. Mr. Copeland had put a few thousands of pounds into them, buying his shares at par. Very soon after, the new company had discovered coal on their own land close by the works, so now they could produce their iron at half the expense. The shares were at an enormous premium, and paying these dividends. It was just Mr. Copeland’s usual luck.

Mr. Lauriston murmured something about the ring of Polycrates, which did not bring the house down because they had all heard it before; and George said—

“I don’t approve of having a big piece of prosperity like that without making some other people the better for it.”

“Let me be one of them,” cried Osmunda, who already wanted for nothing, and was therefore disregarded.

“What can we do?” said Mr. Copeland, who liked the idea.

“Give the poor workhouse people a dinner, and all the school-children in Dorminster a tea, and have a magic lantern or a concert,” said Mrs. Copeland.

“And Audrey and I will have tables for the girls, and George and Edward and Dudley for the boys,” cried Osmunda.

“No,” said George; “we will manage the girls, and you the boys. I assure you they behave far better when things are arranged in that way. The girls will feel what is expected of them when they see us waiting on them. It pays far better in Sunday schools when it is

done so. I have watched the big blundering clumsy creatures of boys, and I am sure they all think they are dealing with an angel at least, when a pretty young lady is teaching them."

"George, my dear fellow, you are talking nonsense," said his father. "Is there nothing else in the paper?"

"Some town council squabbles. Oh, listen to this. Does it not give an exact idea of Dorminster, and of the way every one there knows everything about everybody else? They want a new tax-gatherer, and speak of their want at a meeting. At first they propose to advertise; but the idea is dismissed as an absurd and useless expense, because every one in Dorminster knows very well they want one without that; and they go on to say that as they themselves are perfectly aware of the character of every one in the place, applicants need not trouble themselves to send testimonials. In a town of fifteen or sixteen thousand inhabitants, that implies some powers of memory."

The Copelands had some very good water-colour drawings, and one was a view of Dor-

minster from the house where they used to live before Beaconshill was built. There was a stretch of river curving round low sandy banks, and a two-arched Norman bridge spanned it; and then on the left the town rose above in irregular ranges of red-roofed streets. Old-fashioned red and purply-red and orange houses buttressed up a hill which was crowned by the castle and cathedral. It was sunset, and in the drawing both were bathed in a flood of red light.

“What a romantic place this Dorminster is!” said Dudley, who, though not strong on the side of sentiment, could not help seeing that a town built as it was had a wonderful gift of beauty.

“It is splendid!” said Audrey, “But it is not a bit like this now.”

“No,” replied George. “Was splendid, was beautiful, we ought to say now; but no one can bear to do that, for it is so fine still—only they have widened the bridge and spoilt it, and rebuilt the castle, and had a turn at improving the cathedral. After all, though people talk of the changefulness of skies and clouds and

seas, they are the only things which keep up any likeness to themselves, and that is simply because we cannot get at them to improve and modernize them. Everything else is ruined by us. Thank God! we can't new dye sunsets to suit the taste of the age we live in. What sunsets we used to see there! I often think the mellow old masonry of the cathedral and castle, as they used to be, had some wonderful property of holding the red light prisoner, for long after the sun had set you could see it lingering on them, just as it lingers on the rough bark of Scotch fir-trees. But there were always magnificent effects of one kind or another to be seen from that house."

"But how clear the artist has made the river! He has flattered it."

"Audrey," said Osmunda, "if you make George talk of the river you will repent it."

"Not flattered a bit; it was as clear and as pure as water could be then, and the walk by it into town was lovely."

"Yes, wasn't it?" exclaimed Osmunda. "You went along a sandy irregular kind of a

path, with campanulas and wild geraniums and wreaths of bindweed growing as they liked about it, until you got downhill to the pebbly part of the road, where we used to stand and wonder whether we could get to the end or not before a flood came and drowned us."

"Floods very seldom came," said George, smiling. "But that road was so picturesque! Do you remember how it was edged with old piles, between which the water lapped in and out and sparkled? And then, when the river swept out wide, after falling over the weir, you saw a glassy picture of cathedral, castle, and bridge."

"Yes, and all the way you went, George, do you remember how the men and boys used to fish, and we stood to look at the little heaps they had caught? I can't think what kind of fish they were. They were far prettier than any I ever see now—they were so silvery, and golden, and purple."

"'Travelled o'er by dying gleams,'" said George. "Yes, Audrey, I cannot tell you what a lovely walk that was, or how I hate to go that way now. They have raised the

road into one long ugly embankment, and paved it with cinders and asphalt, which melts under the hot sun so that your feet sink into it. And it gives out an odour which would be unbearably offensive were there not so many worse to contend with. And instead of the picturesque piles, it is bordered with great ugly, old, worn-out iron gaspipes neatly fitted into each other, and laid evenly along. All the glassy sweeps and shallows have disappeared, for the river is closely hemmed in by this embankment, and flows in a straight uninteresting line by its side in dull, dirty depth. Never a fish is to be seen bigger than a stickleback—they were destroyed long ago by the volumes of poisonous matter which stream out of gasworks, paperworks, and manufactories of all kinds. Of course no one can see to the bottom of this murky water, and the cathedral, which used to reflect itself on its surface, shrinks from sight, showing but a blurred image, partly, perhaps, because its own face having fallen into the hands of restorers is defaced, and no longer fair or pleasureable to look upon. Ah, well! they

are going on with this kind of thing everywhere. I suppose I had better hold my tongue, for I am afraid I am cross—this subject always enrages me.”

“You are not really cross, George, are you?” said Audrey.

“Yes, really. This used to be perhaps the very loveliest city in England, and they are rapidly making it an offence to every sense God has given us. And the vexing part of it is this, that if those stupid old canons had had any feeling for beauty, or any knowledge that it was their duty to posterity to guard this place from destruction, they might have done so without the least difficulty; for nearly all the land about the river is chapter property, and they might have preserved it unspoilt for ever. Just think of their riches and their dense dulness!”

“George,” said Audrey, who had not lived six months in Dorminster without learning something of the spirit of the place, “if you speak in that profane way about the chapter, I expect you will shake the cathedral down at the very least. How can you?”

“I thought myself that I saw the centre tower tottering a minute or two ago,” said Dudley. “Now, if you could only shake the canons down or up!”

“They are imbedded in the constitution of their country,” said George, laughing; “besides, those most to blame are dead and gone long ago.”

George Copeland walked home with Audrey and Dudley, as he very often did. Their way was by the Ouseburn Road. On the other side of the river rose the dark mass of the cathedral, with murky clouds clinging about it; but its towers stood out with a blackness which was darker than that of theirs. And down below, the towers of the various town churches reared their heads, and the lights of the town ran in glittering golden necklaces up hilly streets. The locality of the market-place, which was more brilliantly lighted than any other part of the town, was indicated by a soft luminous haze which hung above it in the air. The people of Dorminster were all going to bed; one by one lights shone in the upper windows, one by one they were extinguished, and a deeper gloom succeeded.

“I only mean to go as far as the streets,” said George; “I shall say good-bye then.”

But he did not say it, and went a little further, till nearly at their door.

“Mr. Copeland, sir,” said a decent-looking man whom they now met—“excuse me, sir, but I’d like to say one word to you.”

“I will follow you in a moment,” said George to the Wentworths. “Don’t wait for me.”

“I ask your pardon, sir,” said the man, touching his hat and looking more respectful than ever; “but I wished to say that I have known you from seeing you about ever since you were a boy, and I have a great respect for you, sir; and I’ll thrash anybody you like in the place for a shilling!”

George declined the offer and hurried on, musing on the advantages of always living in one town. As he bid Audrey good-night, the cathedral clock struck eleven, and was immediately followed by the gaol clock in a note two octaves higher; just as the strawberry-seller of London is echoed by a shrill-voiced imp, who takes up his cry when he leaves it

off—only the bells are pleasant, and no fate seems too bad for the strawberry-seller when you hear him.

Audrey, no doubt, thought George went home and to bed; but he had watched so many candles being put out already, that he thought he might as well see her window become dark too, and walked up and down for three quarters of an hour, until at last the man who had spoken to him before thought he must have a secret desire to accept his offer, and came and renewed it. Then, seeing he was observed, George did go.

Audrey's first thought in the morning—first second-rate thought of course—was Mrs. Heriot, and she sent Bridget to the Mitre with a note to ask if she might go to see her. It was answered by the lady herself appearing in person. She fanned herself, though it was a very cold day. She described her preaching rambles with the dear bishop. She sympathized with Audrey, and admired her rooms, the view, the furniture, and was as kind as she could be. After an hour's visit, she exclaimed—

“By-the-by, Audrey dear, I met Mrs. Egerton in Cheltenham” (Mrs. Egerton was an Indian friend of Audrey’s), “and she told me you had bought a lovely shawl when you were in India. Well, I have been thinking about that; and as I am afraid it will only be in your way now, and as I am making such a round of visits with the bishop on this missionary business of his, and staying in friends’ houses and requiring a great deal of nice dress, I don’t mind buying that shawl of you, and will pay you half-price for it, if you want to get rid of it. In point of fact, I suppose the money would be of more use to you?”

“Oh, but I gave that shawl to Mrs. Armitage before we left the Cape.”

“That good shawl! That handsome shawl!” cried Mrs. Heriot, feeling thoroughly aggrieved and cheated of a bargain she had set her heart upon.

“Nothing is too good for Mrs. Armitage.”

“Well, *some* people have extravagantly generous ideas. I can’t understand *how* people can have the face to take such hand-

some presents. She ought to send it back now," said Mrs. Heriot, who would have felt no scruple about buying it in the manner she had suggested.

"I should feel very much hurt if she did," said Audrey.

Then Mrs. Heriot looked around; and seeing the old cabinets and furniture, and a few valuable ornaments given to Dudley by his uncle from the house at Minsteracres, she thought that, after all, they had managed to get some very good pickings out of that place, and that she herself would not mind being ruined in the same way that they had been. Still, cabinets or no cabinets, no one can get on without a little money, and it was a good thing that foolish love affair of Gus's had gone no farther.

"You have not asked after your old friend Gus," said she, with a tone of semi-consciousness in her voice.

"Is he not with you? I thought he was coming to Dorminster when you did," replied Audrey; "he said he should do so the last time I saw him."

“Upon my word, Miss Audrey, you are beginning to find that Gus is better worth looking after than you fancied—but it is too late now!” was Mrs. Heriot’s thought, but she only said, “Gus has to stick to his work now.”

And Audrey, who had no particular interest in him, dropped the subject.

Mrs. Heriot was staying at the Mitre—a good hotel at the other end of Flower Gate. All superior Dorminster went there to pay its respects to her, and every gossip in the street knew she had spent fully an hour and a half sitting talking to *that* Miss Wentworth; and that evening, when she dined at the deanery, Mrs. Heriot was questioned as to every particular of her former acquaintance with Audrey. And she told all she knew, and said—

“She always was a sweet little creature, and very fond of my son Gus; but Gus is a general favourite, dear fellow!”

The next morning Mrs. Wiltshire, who, like every one else in Dorminster, had a deep interest in errant bishops, came in to see Audrey.

“ You never told me you knew Mrs. Heriot and the bishop, Miss Wentworth,” said she, much wondering that such a claim to respect could so long have been kept in the background by Audrey.

“ I never thought you would care to hear it,” replied Audrey simply. “ We came home with them and the Nithisdalses.”

“ General Sir David Nithisdale ! You lucky girl ! I have been longing for some time to become acquainted with him and his family. They lived quite within visiting range all last summer, but they would neither dine out nor give parties—they don’t like society. We exchanged cards once or twice, and there the matter rested.”

“ They came once to Minsteracres to see us. They are very pleasant, quiet people,” remarked Audrey, for an instant departing so far from her usual character as to enjoy Mrs. Wiltshire’s not always having her own way about those with whom she associated.

“ They are abroad now. Were you very intimate with them ? ”

“ Yes ; and with the Heriots too. On board

ship you can't help being intimate with people."

Mrs. Wiltshire smiled grimly. How little Audrey knew of what people could do to avoid an intimacy which they did not wish for, on board ship or anywhere else !

"The bishop and Mrs. Heriot are going to dine with us to-night. We shall be obliged to have a party of some sort to meet them. I only asked the Heriots this very morning, and I sent the groom off on horseback directly they accepted, with a note inviting all the Templemores. I must get three or four others, but we can soon make up a party amongst ourselves in the college."

"I thought Mr. Templemore was very ill," said Audrey, whose attention had been struck by the expression—"All the Templemores."

"So he is, in reality—or so he was, perhaps, for he has been wonderfully better the last two days, they say, since his son came home ; but I don't expect he will come out to dinner. Most likely only Mrs. Templemore and the son will come. It will be a great help to my party to have the son. You see,

the Dorminster people look upon him quite as a hero."

How she talked! Audrey's heart seemed to give a great leap and stand still; and she clenched her hands to try to keep her agitation down. How she wished Mrs. Wiltshire would but ask her and her brother to dine there too! Evidently the party was not yet formed, so she might still do so. How she would tremble and wish to sink into the earth if such a miracle occurred as that she should be invited and went and saw him!

"You were a very shabby girl," said Mrs. Wiltshire, "and would not come when I asked you before. Why was it, dear? Had you no dress ready?"

"Oh, plenty of dresses," cried Audrey; "at least, if those I had for the Government House balls would do. But while we are living here as we are, Dudley does not like me to go out." And then, poor child, she repented this speech, and blushed; for she could read Mrs. Wiltshire's thoughts, and saw that some faint intention of inviting her to dine in the evening was passing through

her mind. It was so natural she should think of this, knowing that Audrey was so well acquainted with the Heriots; and now, after that speech, she would not. Audrey felt that thus she had been the architect of her own fate, and that now she would neither be invited on this nor on any other occasion. Nervously, therefore, she added, "I don't mean that Dudley would dislike my going out to friends' houses, but I think he would not wish me to get to know many new people here."

"I dare say not, dear; but you like the Heriots?"

Audrey felt her fate trembling in the balance. She put a warmth into her answer which no inward feeling towards the bishop or his wife justified. "Yes, very much; we were so long together."

"Then will you come and have luncheon with me to-morrow, punctually at one, and I will do my best to get Mrs. Heriot to meet you? A luncheon always comes so easy after a dinner-party."

"No, thank you," said Audrey, deeply hurt,

and woefully cast down after her high hopes, "I am going to take a walk with my brother; and I dare say Mrs. Heriot will have luncheon with us one day this week. Dudley said I was to be sure to ask her."

"But don't refuse," said Mrs. Wiltshire; "I should like you to come."

"I can't disappoint my brother," replied Audrey. "I am sorry, but I must not accept."

Some other conversation followed; and then Audrey, interested to the point of being careless of appearances, said—

"Are you sure Mr. Brian Templemore has returned?"

Yes, he was at home—Mrs. Wiltshire knew that. She had sent a servant over on some errand or other two days ago, and he had seen young Mr. Templemore standing in the hall in a large circle of portmanteaus and packing-cases. He had travelled down from London the night before, the man thought. Mrs. Templemore had sent for her son in the autumn, and had always declared that nearly all her husband's illness

was caused by his anxiety to see him safely at home again. And when Audrey asked what was the matter with the father, she was told that he was suffering from an affection of the heart; that sometimes he was quite prostrate with it, at others, in a state when any excitement or emotion might speedily end his life; but that, as he had hitherto always rallied after these attacks, and after a certain time been completely himself again, no doubt he would rally again.

“Then you won’t come to luncheon tomorrow?” said Mrs. Wiltshire, regretfully, as she rose to take leave.

No, Audrey was inflexible; but she was also determined to get Mrs. Heriot to come and have luncheon with her as soon as possible. Then she would hear how Brian had looked at the dinner that was going to take place this evening, and what he had said.

“You are sure you won’t come?” again said the bewildered lady, hardly able to understand such pushing back of good gifts as this conduct of Audrey’s. “Then I won’t ask Mrs. Heriot either—I only thought of doing

it for your sake." And she departed, bearing Audrey's thanks and refusal with her.

He had come the day before yesterday! More than forty-eight hours without seeing her! Then she remembered his ailing father, and loved him for being such a good son as not to leave him. And then a thought came to her which sent the blood careering through her veins in hot haste, for might he not come and see her this very day, before going to the dinner-party?

END OF VOL. I.

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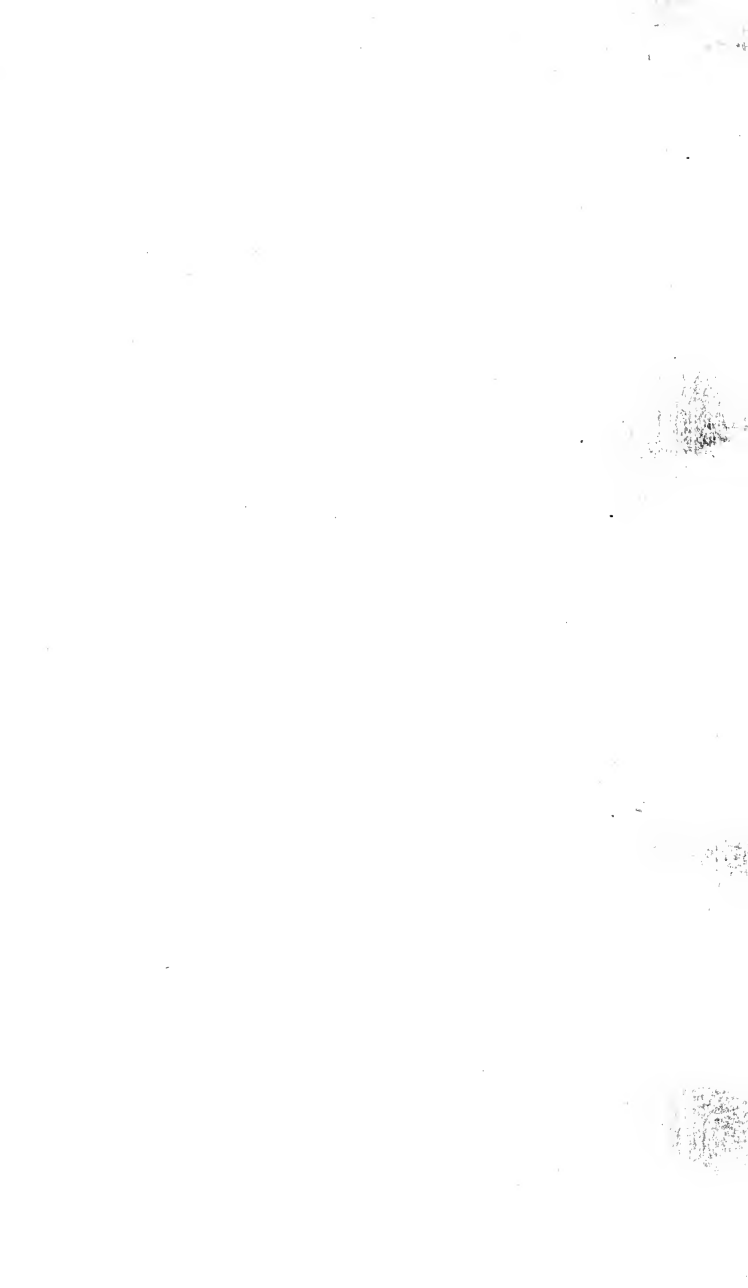
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